Story of a Struggle
An Autobiography



Bairagi Charan Mishra

translated by
Priyambada Pal

STORY OF A STRUGGLE

An Autobiography

Bairagi Charan Mishra

Translated from the Oriya by

Priyambada Pal



RUPANTAR

First published in India in 2008 by Rupantar: A Centre for Translation.
N6/ 470, I.R.C. Village, Nayapalli, Bhubaneswar-751015, Orissa

Website: www.rupantar.net
Email: rupantarorissa@yahoo.co.in

ISBN 978-81-906729-0-0

Rupantar is a no-profit organisation committed to preserving and promoting cultural diversity through translation.

Cover Design : Triveni
Printed at Siksha Prakashani, Bhubaneswar

Childhood

I was born into a Brahmin joint family in Mulabasant village in Salepur police station in Cuttack district. I tore up my horoscope some twenty-five years back as I thought that it was pointless, even harmful, to learn about one's future from one's horoscope. But I forgot to note down the date of my birth from it while tearing it into pieces. So I do not know the actual date of my birth. A cousin of mine, who happens to be three, four months older than me, told me that he was born in September 1885. Therefore, I must have been born in November or December of the same year.

I mentioned that I was born into a joint family. During my childhood, joint families, wherein three, four generations lived together, were common in Orissa. I have seen fifty, sixty members living happily in a joint family. Everyone used to keep herds of cattle those days. People were very healthy as they ate plenty of milk and ghee. There existed love and cooperation among family members. Womenfolk used to wear heavy jewelleries made of silver, which looked beautiful on them. People were simple-hearted, sincere and honest. In the twentieth century, western education spread widely in Orissa. As a result, selfishness and conceit crept into people's mind and these loosened the bonds of affection among family members. Educated Oriyas, who went to cities, got dazzled by the gold ornaments, with which Bengali women adorned themselves. They too got gold jewellery for their wives. This desire to show off their affluence grew stronger and people sold milk, ghee, even their cattle to buy gold jewellery. This obsession with jewellery led to jealousy among women and destroyed feelings of love and affection. Several joint families fell apart due to this fascination for jewellery.

Agriculture no longer remained central to people's lives with the spread of western education. People sold their land to educate

their children. Those who took up jobs after completing formal education earned more than others. They did not have to exert themselves physically in order to earn a handsome salary, and spent their earnings lavishly to lead a life of luxury. The stout and healthy daily labourers, who were earlier engaged in works like agriculture, emulated the example of these educated men and left for Calcutta and Kharagpur in the hope of earning more. Hence, farming was left to few lean old men past work. Gradually, people lost all interest in agriculture and opted for well-paid government jobs. Their desire to flaunt their opulence increased. By 1925-1926, many joint families had disintegrated—only about two or three percent of the total number of families remained as joint families. Members of these families were no longer tied to each other by affection. These few families lived in depressing conditions at home; they did not dare get separated for fear of social criticism. Many of them also believed that ill luck would befall the person who would leave the family. Debates were held in schools and colleges those days on whether joint families should exist or not. I took part in many such debates and always argued in favour of the existence of joint families.

I mentioned that I was born into a Brahmin family. During my childhood Brahmins used to enjoy a lot of respect in society. Our family was held in high esteem as we were equal in status to the Sambhukar, Vajpayee and Bharadwaj Brahmins. Now-a-days, people have lost all their respect for Brahmins, let alone revere Brahmins belonging to superior sect. People value money, degrees like B.A. and M.A. and good jobs. Earlier, they used to get their daughters married into families of superior sect of their caste and accept girls from lower sect of their caste as their daughters-in-laws as instructed in the scriptures. I had married off my daughter into a Kar family, who are considered inferior Brahmins. My wife died when I was forty. My mother said to me, 'We brought daughters-in-laws from Kar families, but we didn't give our daughters in marriage to them. Your wife died so early because you gave your daughter in marriage to a Kar family.' No such superstitious beliefs prevail in society in

present time. People give their daughters in marriage to lower castes if they get alliance from wealthy families or find candidates having a salaried job.

The distinction between superior and inferior sect in a particular caste no longer exist, moreover, the social gap between Brahmins and non-Brahmins is also vanishing from society. No doubt, caste distinctions should completely be abolished from society. But every man should be allowed to think freely whether the previous consideration of castes in a marriage was desirable. Thereafter, they should act further in this direction. I was the eldest son of my father. My dadei, who was the elder brother of my father, had two sons. As my kakei, the younger brother of my father, was issueless, he adopted the youngest son of my dadei. We four brothers used to address our dadei, kakei, and father as 'Dadei bapa', 'Daria bapa', and 'Lochana bapa' respectively. We used to address our dethei, khudi and mother as 'Dudhi bou', 'Aau bou' and 'Puni bou' respectively. We children addressed them in this way, which taught us not to harbour feelings of discrimination between one's father and uncles or one's mother and aunts. Each of us held the same respect for them. All four of us addressed our younger uncle as 'Daria bapa' because he lived in Dariapur. He was a teacher there. My father's name is Padma Lochana Mishra. We addressed him as 'Lochana Bapa' because our Dadei called him 'Lochana'. My elder sister's name was Puni, so we all addressed my mother as 'Puni bou' (Puni's mother). Dadei was a Sanskrit scholar and an ideal householder. He did not show any partialities in his behaviour towards others. There was not an iota of greed in him and he never got angry with anyone. He was an inspecting teacher in the education department and used to receive a salary of eighteen rupees a month. He used to keep that amount in a stone-glass in one corner of a chest made of wood. Father used to meet all household expenses and looked after our farms. My uncle had become a follower of Sri Chaitanya and used to wear a string of holy basil beads round his neck. That was the reason why he could never participate in family functions and feasts. He used to spend half of what he earned on poor helpless people and on social functions

and village fairs. He used to smoke cannabis, as he believed that it helped one's concentration. Although these three brothers were of completely different temperaments, no quarrel or differences of opinion ever arose among them. The happiness which I had experienced living in a joint family like ours is not to be found anywhere these days. I have been witnessing for a long time the degeneration of families resembiling heaven into places worse than hell. The peaceful atmosphere no longer pervades the homes and feeings of love diminished from the members who live there. My cousin whom Dadei had adopted was three, four years older than me. Both of us were initiated together and married on the same day. We got married when we were about thirteen or fourteen years old. A few days after our marriage, Dadei sent us to Baripada High School to pursue higher studies. Railways were not introduced in Baripada then. We had to cover a distance of about thirty-five or thirty-six kilometers from Balasore to Baripada riding a Bullock cart. We used to get scared while journeying during the night. We were sent to such a long distance as boarding charge in Baripada School was two rupees per month. Maharaja Ramachandra Bhanja used to meet all the expences of the boarding school. Students who came from far away places did not have to pay the school fee. In 1906, both of us passed the entrance examination (now known as the matriculation exam), got scholarships and were enrolled in Cuttack College. We earned fifteen rupees every month by giving private tuitions to both the sons of Radhaprasad Bhagat. Dadei, who had sent us to pursue higher studies, passes away in 1907. Our education came to an end there as our financial condition did not allow us to study further.

My Wayward Behavoiur

While studying in the boarding school, we (students) often went to a park named, Ranibag Park. There was a marble slab in the middle of the park on which were inscribed, 'Thy will be done'. This marble slab is still present there. I could never understand its menaing, what others explained me completely misleading. It took me quite long to realise the essence of the message, which actually means, 'Oh God!

Whatever I do should follow your will.' But people used to misinterpret it (It is misinterpreted by people even today) as, 'Whatever man does is willed by God. Human beings have no control over what they do.' It has been found that people, who have interpreted the *Gita*, have often misinterpreted the thirty-third *sloka* of the eleventh canto, which reads, 'Nimitta Matram Bhaba Sabyasachim!' People also explain the saying in *The Mahabharat*, 'Twaya Hrishikesha! Hridisthitena, Jatha Nijuktosmi Tatha Karomi' to there advantage and thereby justify all their wrong doings. Blinded by anger many so-called righteous men and Sanskrit scholars beat their wives. They also earn a lot of money through all sorts of iniquitous means. When they are asked why they behaved in such a way fully knowing the scriptures, they defend their deed by quoting lines from *The Mahabharat,* 'Jatha Nijuktosmi Tatha Karomi.' That is, 'We have no control over God's will.' because, I also fell a victim to such wrong notions. That was why I discussed the message, 'Thy will be done' inscribed on the stone slab at such great length. You will learn more about it afterward.

I failed in the F.A Examination (now known as I.A). I learnt to play cards during my college days and got a lot of pleasure out of it. I remained awake through nights to play the game of cards. If anyone ever stopped me from playing, I protested saying, 'Thy will be done'—my playing cards is willed by God. No one can act against His wish. How could I play it if God had not wanted me to play? I neglected my studies and this led to my failure. I believed in one more axiom in my college days— Failure is the pillar of success. These two beliefs of mine gave me consolation when I received the news of my failure in the F.A. examination. It did not take me long to perceive my failure as willed by God. I also firmly believed that this failure was the pillar of my future success. I had seen and realised early in my life that those who pass examinations with flying colours take up good jobs with attractive salaries and become more selfish than others. They start showing off their social status and look down upon and even despise the poor, uneducated people. They take pride

in the fact that they can buy gold jewellries for their wives. But this way of thinking fails to serve any good to society; rather it affects the society adversely in many ways. I thought that if I passed B.A. and M.A. examinations and joined a salaried job, I would also start aping these people and would not contribute anything to society.

The financial condition of my family was not sound, but I never felt inclined to join a government job. On the other hand, my cousin was worldy-wise. He had noticed my indifference and cynical attitude towards worldy affairs. He became a sort of guardian and asked me to apply for the post of the probationer in the collector's court. I applied for the post goaded by him and got the job. Probationers used to receive a salary of ten rupees per month those days. I received orders to work in the Jajpur subdivision office. In spite of myself, I went to Jajpur at my cousin's instance. We had to reach the office by half past ten in the morning, but I used to reach there around twelve to twelve-thirty P.M. everyday. I intentionally did this to annoy the senior officers and get dismissed from the job. If I resigned on my own, every one would put the blame on me. Moreover, I remembered the lines, 'Thy will be done.' The head clerk (sirastadar) at the office always grew angry with me for my lack of seriousness and sweared at me. Whenever he cussed me, I used to hit back, saying, 'Sack me if you want, I have no objections to that, but you have no right to tell me off like this.' He would keep quiet when I answered him back this way. When I started working in the law department, once the Deputy ordered us to work during the Puja holidays instead of going home as a lot of work lay pending in the office. Our home lay at a distance of nearly twenty-two, twenty-four miles from the office. I had already sent for a bullock cart by which I could travel the distance. I desperately wanted to go home. I went to the head clerk's residence and asked him to permit me to go home. He got infuriated and said, 'Go if you want. But when you come back, I'll dismiss you right away.' I went home (keeping well in mind his words). When I joined office after the holidays, the Deputy demanded an explanation from me. I wrote the following as my explanation, 'I had gone home after

taking permission from the head clerk. He gave me his consent to go home.' The Deputy did not dismiss me this time.

Two other probationers also worked in the office. They used to get contracts to work for almost eight to nine months a year, with a remuneration of twenty-five to thirty rupees per month. The head clerk never offered such contracts to me. I worked there for four years receiving a salary of only ten rupees a month. I always wanted to get transferred to the Cuttack High Court. In 1912, Izton sahib came for office inspection. I handed over an application to the head clerk a day before the sahib's arrival. The application read, 'I have been working here for four long years receiving a salary of only ten rupees per month. My home is in Cuttack sub-division. Please transfer me to Cuttack.' The head clerk read the application and said, 'I will not give any remarks on your application. You take it back.' I said, 'You may not write anything in favour of me, but please forward it to the sahib.' He retorted, '*Forwarded*! So many letters! If I touch your paper, I must write something against you.' I brought my application back with a heavy heart. The sahib came for inspection the next day. As I was feeling low, I wandered aimlessly in the morning and reached the Cutcherry at twelve noon. Before my arrival, the sahib had finished inspecting the head clerk's work and was looking for me. The head clerk seethed with anger as I was absent. A peshkar named Bhagaban babu saw me walking towards the Cutcherry, an umbrella in my hand. He ran to me, threw my umbrella in a corner of a room and presented me before the sahib. I was perspiring as I had been walking in the sun; what's more, Bhagaban babu had dragged me to the sahib. Seeing me in such a condition, the sahib remarked, 'This probationer seems to be more hard working and intelligent than the other two; he is more eligible than them. They get contracts to work for eight to nine months. Why isn't this man given any contracts?' Before the head clerk could say anything, I joined in saying, 'Sir, my house is in the Cuttack sub-division. I've been working here with a lot of difficulty for four years with a salary of only ten rupees per month.' As soon as the sahib heard this, he

said to the head clerk, 'Giridhari babu has applied for a leave at Cuttack; this man should be relived to replace him.' The head clerk objected, 'This man can not replace him.' I reacted, 'Sir, of course I can work there.' The sahib did not wait for the head clerk's opinion and wrote his orders on the inspection notes that I should be transferred to replace Giridhari babu. Giridhari babu used to receive a salary of forty-five rupees per month. All the clerks remarked, 'Bairagi babu, you are a very fortunate man.' I was also very happy from within. But Giridhari babu, the head clerk in the Cuttack Cutchery, was a sincere employee and always obeyed the rules. He found out that the sahib's orders were not rules. According to the rules, one who already received forty rupees per month as salary should receive a salary of forty-five rupees. He did not obey the sahib's orders and my transfer stopped. After three or four months of that incident, I wrote an application to the sahib about my inconvenience at Jajpur and the sahib got me transferred to Cuttack with a contract job. My salary was fixed at twenty-five rupees per month.

When I was working in Jajpur, I always preached against idolatry. Many people tried to change my opinion but were not successful in convincing me otherwise. My maternal uncle, Gobinda Chandra Kar worked as the head clerk at the sub-registrar's office. I was staying at his residence. He used to go to the lord Shiva temple everyday and offer sandalwood paste and bel leaves to the deity. He also used to wash the premises of the temple regularly. He said to me, 'Come with me to the temple, clean its surrounding, offer sandalwood paste and bel leaves to the Lord. You will feel devotion for the Lord afterwards.' I obeyed him and did so for almost one month; but it did not help me develop any devotion for lord Shiva.

Atmaram Agnihotri, a Brahmin, used to work as a clerk in the Cutcherry at Cuttack. He resided near the temple of Goddess Biraja. Wine is offered to Goddess Biraja on the occasion of Durgastami; afterwards the Brahmins partake of that offering. So, nobody stopped the Brahmins from consuming alcohol there. Agnihotry babu drank

liquor openly. One day, he said to me, 'If there is anything in this world that gives pleasure, it is wine. Try it out and discover it for yourself. I tasted wine with other two friends. I got pleasure out of it and consumed it on many occasions.'

I got transferred to Cuttack after some days. Radha Prasad Nayak let me stay at his residence. When I and my cousin were studying at Cuttack College, we stayed at his house and gave his two sons private tuitions. He was a rich and influential man in Cuttack and led a luxurious life. I also led such a luxurious life. Whatever I did then I defended it by the saying, 'Thy will be done.' A Muslim family lived nearby the place where I stayed. I took food at their residence on many occasions. Whenever my brothers got perturbed by my deeds and tried to prevent it, I defended myself saying, 'Thy will be done— this is God's wish. Can I act against His wish?' They could never put forth any satisfactory argument after getting this answer from me. I indulged in such a wayward life-style for almost two years.

Change in My Outlook

Jivantara Sarkar, a professor of philosophy at the Cuttack College, was once delivering a lecture in the Music mutt at Balubazar. He spoke on, 'Conscience'. Both he and I used to study in the same class in Baripada for two or three years. I thought deeply about what he said that day and I realised that whatever I was doing on a whim was against my conscience and that it was also against God's will. The next day, I went to Jivan babu's residence. He heard everything from me and clarified my misconceptions so convincingly that I took a vow there never to repeat my impulse driven actions of the past. I realised that people go astray taken in by blind beliefs. If someone passed by me while I was sitting on the veranda of my house, I would call him and say, 'I've found the truth. Truth is what my conscience tells me. It dwells within every individual.' Radha Prasad Bhagat and other friends of mine tried their best to keep me in their company. But I never committed the mistake of getting influenced by them again. From that day onwards anything regarding God failed to have an impact on me. Subsequently, I tried to decide

my duties towards society. I kept myself confined to a small room and thought at length over how people would listen to their conscience and give up blind beliefs and perform conscientious deeds. At those moments of introspection, I did not allow anyone to enter my room. Many people thought that I had gone mad when they noticed me behave this way. I would dream—I was flying fearlessly in the sky. People were running and calling me. But nobody could do any harm to me. I wrote a book, *Sukhaneswana* (The search for happiness), which dealt with how people can relate to their conscience and make their lives happy. At that time, I did not know how to express my thought through writing. I copy a few points from that book below. One can get a view of ideas I pondered over at that time:

1. To work conscientiously and to work for the welfare of humanity— both are two sides of the same coin. People blindly follow the conventions because they fail to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong. We must not perform any action either in fear of social criticism or in order to get admiration from others.

2. Someone, who lacks conscience and fellow-feeling, can neither be a Brahmin nor a Muslim. If this was not the case, one could make a monkey wear a sacred thread and put holy marks on its forehead and say that it was a Brahmin. One could also fetch a parrot and make it utter, 'Om, Shanti, Shanti, Shanti'. Would the bird turn into a Brahmin by this?

3. We consider the manual labour as degrading, which is carried out to earn a living. We look down upon those who toil hard to make a living. Such people can only belong to the lower rung of the caste hierarchy such as farmers and weavers. Most of us think that if our children get education, they would get good jobs with attractive salaries and would be better off in life. But such notions are absolutely wrong. Let us presume that everyone belonging to a particular village get engaged in well-paid occupations after having formal education and earn about three hundred or four hundred rupees every month. The overall income of the village amounts to thousands and thousands of rupees. Would the villagers eat and wear the money they earned?

4. If people put all the blame on society and blindly follow what others do, will the problems of society be solved?

5. Happiness is around us, but we are blind to embrace it. If we learnt to hold on to the happiness that we experienced when we got something, all our problems would vanish. But we never do that. We always try to hold onto things that gives us pleasure; we presume that pleasure will yield happiness. The world would become a happy place to live in if we could but realise that happiness does not depend upon what we possess. What I said, can be understood better from this example: A child is born. Its arrival brings happiness to the family. Both the things came, but I did not make any attempts to retain the bliss that came in; instead, I considered the source of pleasure to be the child itself. The child was taken away from me when time came. I fought with the world to get it back. But I lost in the battle. I blamed the world as being cruel, and the world replied, 'Brother, when this child took birth I told you that the happiness is yours but the object is mine. Why did you take the object to be happiness instead of holding on to happiness itself? How am I to blame for the consequence?'

I Repaid the Loan

A family, which lived near our house, was in debt and failed to pay back the loan to the money lender. I had seen the way the family went through humiliation when the moneylender made the attachment of property after filling a petition. I came to know that the family fell into debt because of spending unnecessarily on jewelleries and on ceremonials. Our family also fell into debt. The capital with interests amounted to 1,400 rupees. I thought of an idea to free my family from the debt and was gradually able to pay up to 500 rupees. We had loaned the amount from a moneylender named Gopi Sadangi who belonged to Kumuda Jayapur village, nearby our village. We had borrowed 500 rupees from him. The interest was twenty-five percent of the loaned amount. I regularly paid the moneylender 125 rupees for two, three years. Once the moneylender came to the Cutcherry and asked me to pay the interest of one year. I said to him,

'You lend the amount to others which you receive from me every year as interest. You also get interest from them. Please take 100 rupees from the amount of 125 rupees which I pay you as interest and accept 25 rupees out of that amount towards the Capital.'

He said, 'I can't exempt anything now. I will exempt you some amount when you repay the entire sum of money.' I said, 'I don't ask you to exempt anything from the debt. I am only requesting you to accept a part of the amount I pay off as the capital because I am regularly repaying the debt.' But the gentleman did not pay any heed to me. He got irritated with me as I did not pay him the amount of 25 rupees which I was supposed to pay. I told him, 'Please remember that I will pay back the entire loan within three months.' At that time, I used to earn around 32 rupees from the Cutcherry and 10 rupees from Radha Prasad Bhagat's house. I made the calculations and found out that the moneylender's interests would be 400 rupees and capital would be 500 rupees. I had no idea how I could repay this amount with the meagre amount I earned. But I was always conscious that I had promised the moneylender to repay the loan within three months. I cut down on my expenses. I started eating gravy made of ou with rice instead of pulses. I brought greens, which grew by the pond, to prepare curry. I did not buy any new clothes or shoes. People thought that I had gone mad when they saw me in rags. After quite some time, when I was able to save some money, I gave a feast to the clerks in the Cutcherry and there I collected the interest of the money that I had lent them. If anyone borrowed 20 rupees, I made him write a hand note of 30 rupees and reminded him that they would have to pay 21 rupees (1 rupee as interest) at the end of the month; otherwise I would file a petition in the court that I had lent them 30 rupees.

In addition, I also encouraged them to mortgage jewellery. But for this, I demanded a higher rate of interest. I sold all the valuable articles that I possessed – my bicycle, an Alistor watch etc. But I failed to collect the required amount and borrowed about one hundred and fifty rupees from Radha Prasad Bhagat's nephew, Lakshmi Prasad

Bhagat and was finally able to repay the entire amount to the moneylender. Everyone considered me to be a fool as I repaid the loan which was a responsibility of all the four brothers of mine. It gave me tremendous satisfaction when I freed my family from the burden of the debt. That day I took a vow in front of my brothers that I would never ever borrow money from anyone and that I would leave the house if anyone among my family members does the same. Two years after this incident, I came to know that my elder brother had brought a loan of 200 rupees. I reacted to this saying, 'I will not live in this house any more.' After hearing this, my father said to me, 'Then take your wife and children with you.' He probably thought that their conditions might deteriorate after I left home. No one took his wife abroad those days. Our villagers had forced an advocate from our village to expiate for taking his wife to Cuttack. The Dhanamandal station, which was near our village, was at a distance of nearly six kilometres. We could not hire a bullock cart as it was a rainy day. Hence, we— I, my wife, and our two sons and two daughters— had to walk down to the station. Rain waters stood on the roads. My sons walked with the help of sticks and a labourer was hired to carry my little daughters. When we set off from home, almost all the villagers had gathered in the middle of the village near a platform to see us. My father-in-law's house was near the Dhanamandala station. They were very sorry to see us walking all the way from home like this. We took food at his house and then came to the station. We rented a house next to the Ravenshaw Girl's High School at Gangamandir. I had to pay eleven rupees per month towards rent. I got a salary of thirty-four rupees at that time. As I had taken a vow never to borrow money again, we had to survive on the amount which was left— a meagre twenty three rupees.

I told my wife that it was good enough if one rupee from this amount could be saved, but not a penny more than that should be spent at any cost. My wife was aware of the vow that I had taken and she became careful while spending money. When I came to Cuttack, I promised myself that I would never spend unnecessarily on

jewelleries and ceremonials as I had already experienced the bitter consequences of extravagance.

My father passed away two years after I left home with my family. As our standing, at least 200 rupees was supposed to be spent on his funeral rites. But I was strictly against spending so much on funerals. I had nearly forty rupees with me at the time. My mother felt deeply hurt when I said that I would not spend a penny more than 5 rupees on the funeral ceremony. I had to give in to my mother's whims and spend the entire amount on the funeral rites. I also had to follow certain blind beliefs. My elder brother's maternal uncle and my younger brother's father-in-law insisted that I borrowed some money from them without any interest. But I did not do so as I had promised myself never to borrow money in my life. They got annoyed with me and left the place. After some days, my mother died in our village. I was in Cuttack at the time of her death. I did not follow any rituals this time. Many people told me, 'Even though you don't follow the rituals, you at least get yourself purified on the tenth day. Throw away your old utensils and buy new ones instead.' I said, 'My mother died some twenty-two kilometres away from where I live. How come my utensils got impure? I also see no reason why I should get purified on her *dasaha*, the tenth day after her death, if I didn't do so on the eighth and ninth day after her death.' Many people in Cuttack came to know that I did not follow the death rites. Parikshita Das has related this in his book, *Dayikamada* – you can read on this in the chapter, 'Widow Remarriage.'

Parental Property

A year after my father's death, three brothers of mine – a younger brother and two elder brothers – found it difficult to stay together and decided to get separated. They sent for me at the time of separation but I did not go there. I felt deeply hurt to learn about their parting. My elder brothers came to me to Cuttack and obtained my signature on the property distribution papers. I did not go through what was written on those documents. I had realised that people

become poor due to these reasons: depending upon parental property, spending too much on a luxurious lifestyle and selling off ornaments. I decided not to accept any shares from the parental property. I thought over the matter at length and reached the conclusion that one who was physically fit, could live happily even with the amount he earned by washing dishes at other's place. I hold the same opinion even today. I feel depressed when I see people earning a lot of money by telling lies, accepting bribes, becoming servile to others and spending the amount they earn on jewelleries and maintaining a luxurious lifestyle. When I was working in the Cutcherry, I always said to my colleagues, 'We have to do things beneath our dignity in order to show off our affluence and fear all the time that we may lose our job/ position. We wouldn't have to succumb to these if we could but muster courage to lead a simple life by forgoing all the luxuries. Thereby, we would not have to serve anyone and feel diminished in front of them.'

Taking My Son out of School

I have mentioned earlier that I had suffered the vicissitudes of the prevailing blind beliefs in my childhood. These beliefs of mine got strengthened during the non-cooperation movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. As a consequence I stopped my sons from going to school. Their names were struck off the school register. My elder son Sarat Kumar read in a Sanskrit tol for some days and one day left home without telling anyone anything about it. He met a friend of mine in Calcutta called Kedar Nath Mallik and told him about such behaviour of mine. Kedar Nath Mallik was an important member of the Brahmabidya Samiti. He was well acquainted with my nature as I was also a member of that committee and we shared a close bond. He made arrangements for Sarat Kumar's further studies in the Ayurvedic school in Calcutta which belonged to Kabiraj Shyam Das. My cousin took my younger son and got him admitted in the school where he himself worked as the principle. My younger son passed his minor school there. Then my cousin got him admitted to the Cuttack Academy School. He failed twice in the matriculation

examination due to my indifference. Now he works as an accountant in the textile office. My elder son had opened a medical store in Buxi Bazar. He died suddenly of blood pressure a few days ago on November 6, 1956. He was only 47 years old when he died. He is survived by six sons and two daughters. My younger son has one daughter and one son from his first marriage to a widdow. After the death of his first wife, he has taken another wife who happened to be a widow. He has one daughter and one son from his second wife also.

Using a Talei and a Palm-leaf Umbrella

During the non-cooperation movement, I developed the notion that India will definitely get independence if we stopped/gave up using foreign made goods. So I and my wife carded cotton and made clothes for ourselves. I stopped using foreign made umbrellas and used a 'talei' and a pakhia, parasol, made of palm leaves instead when it rained heavily. When I went to the Cutcherry wearing khaddar clothes reaching up to my knees and holding a palm leave talei over my head, small kids watched me in amusement from over the terrace and screamed out, 'Here comes the talei babu'. Two years after going to the Cutcherry like that, the police inspector, Mr Srikrushna Mohapatra reported to the magistrate sahib who sent for me and said, 'You come and see me in my cabin tomorrow.' The Nazar and the sirastadar/head clerk suspected that the magistrate has decided to dismiss me from my job. They felt sorry for they knew about my family history and the financial condition I was in. I said to them, 'I won't feel sorry if I get dismissed. One, who is physically fit, can manage to survive in this world by doing any work he gets. I won't feel degraded even if my wife has to do others' dishes to feed my children.' Next day morning I met the magistrate. He said to me that the police inspector had reported that I was a declared non-cooperator. I asked the magistrate, 'What do you mean by "declared non-cooperator?"' The magistrate explained to me what the term meant. I said to him, 'Sir, neither any of the non-cooperators knows me, nor do I recognise any of them.' The sahib demanded, 'Then why do you

come to the Cutcherry wearing Khaddar and holding a palm leave talei?' I recounted to the sahib all about my past life and he listened to me with patience. Then I said to him, 'I receive a salary of only 34 rupees. From that amount I pay 11 rupees towards house rent. My family, which consists of me, my wife, two sons and two daughters, have to make do with the rest of the amount – 23 rupees. I have promised to myself that I would neither accept bribe nor would borrow money from anyone. I had bought an umbrella by paying one rupee. That umbrella got stolen in the Nazarkhana. I can't spend a rupee or two more to buy another umbrella. So I use a talei and a pakhia made of palm leaves by paying a lesser amount of six paise or without paying anything at all for it.' The sahib thought I was not at fault and let me go saying, 'You may use any kind of umbrella and wear any dress but outside my office compound. If you come to my office as a pilgrim I must give you a good bye.' From that day onwards I entered the office only after keeping my palm-leave umbrella in a shop near the Cutcherry.

A Change Comes over me

After some days, I came to meet Sudhananda Brahmachary, a propagandist of the Theosophical Society. I he told me about this society, which was based on the principles of truth and universal brotherhood. These two principles had an immense impact upon me and I became one of its members.

I realised that I should dedicate my life working for the welfare of society and to establish universal brotherhood among people. I felt as one's partiality towards one's family is regarded as selfishness, partiality towards one's country is also selfishness. During this time a transformation came over me. I developed a sceptical attitude. I would wonder how could one uphold feelings of brotherhood in society when one fails to do it in his/her own family?

This implied that it was necessary to stop joint families from getting disintegrated, and to try to retain the feelings of mutual love and affection among the siblings in a family. In order to clarify my

doubts, I wrote to the president of the society, Dr. Besant and some other knowledgeable members regarding the matter. Lakshminarayana Sahoo was one of the members of this society. Through his help I could talk to other members of the society as well. But none of them gave a satisfactory reply to me. Lakshminarayana Sahoo had suggested me that my doubt will not be clarified unless I spoke to them directly regarding this. After some days, an important member of this society, Mr Baijnath, who was a priest from Benaras, came to Cuttack. I shared my confusion with him. He said, 'Creation lay emphasis on the growth and freedom of every individual. For this very reason no familial bonds or groups can or would sustain forever in future.' The gentleman spelt out these things so nicely that it led to another transformation in my life and character. Earlier, I felt sad when I saw a joint family disintegrating. But no longer did this bother me. I realised that individualism is absolutely necessary for the development of every human being. Whenever I found a joint family trying to live together in spite of differences for fear of social criticism, I tried to explain to them that it was the law of Nature and that they should part for the sake of development of every individual. I also explained them the advantages and charms of living individually and advised them to live independently.

My Life Takes Another Turn

I went to Madras to attend a convention of the Theosophical Society in 1927. Two other members from Cuttack accompanied me. There I had the opportunity to see J. Krishnamurthy for the first time. People used to call him, 'The World Teacher'. He was thirty years old then. Many members of the society who were older than him, driven by superstitious beliefs, used to take the dust of his feet. None of them listened even when Krishnamurthy took away his feet and asked them not to do so. I was surprised to find something different there. A man went and stood before a temple resembling a Hindu pagoda and chanted mantras such as *Purushasukta* from the *Veda*. He went on to offer an *arati* to God. But there was no image

inside the temple. What was special about this worship was that Muslim and Christian also participated in it. Both men and women from all religion, sects accepted holy basil leaves soaked in water that was offered to God. When the arati was over, all of them took the smoke coming out of the flame and breathed it in. The puja was called the 'Indian Society' or 'the congregational puja'. Mr Krishnamurthy was the initiator of this form of worship. It had been decided that the convention of the Brahmabidya society should take place in Madras and Benares every year by turn. I went to attend the convention in 1930, which took place in Banaras. Dr. Besant ws appointed its president every year. That year he probably went away somewhere else in order to become the president of the Congress and appointed Mr J. Krishnamurthy as the president instead. But today's Krishnamurti is not the same as the Krishnamurthy who had started the Bharat Samaj Puja. Now he is a man with a changed opinion. He gave orders that no one should be allowed to perform any kind of puja in the premises/surrounding of the convention. Many members objected to this. A lot of arguments took place among the members regarding this but no one was successful in performing any puja there. Krishnamurty's purpose behind this was that people should give up believing all sorts of blind beliefs and recognize the truth. Later on, I read some books written by him where he wrote that the Brahmabidya committee had also given birth to many blind beliefs and blind following of conventions. From that time my wish to remain a member of that society died out. Even then I remained there for the next nine to ten years. But afterwards I severed all my links with the Brahmabidya committee.

The Dining Committee

Mr Gopala Chandra Praharaj was the president of the Brahmabidya committee during 1940-1941. He said to me, 'You please join the committee again.' I said, 'Unless any developmental activities are taken up by the committee, I wouldn't be its member and follow the blind beliefs all over again.' He agreed with my proposal to initiate developmental works in the committee. I decided

to form a committee called the 'Dining Committee' where only vegetarian food would be cooked. People irrespective of caste and religion would be allowed to participate in it. A sum of four annas would be collected every month from each member for the feast. Thirty people (both the members of the committee and some outsiders) took part in the feast. This dining committee was held in my official residence for three times. A Brahmin cook called Bir Panda from Mansingh Para used to do the cooking. Two Muslims, one of them a homeopathic doctor named Munsi Zaheer, and another, a clerk in the collector's Cutcherry called Mohammad Erfan, used to attend this feast. Two *durries* were spread on the ground in two rows. These two Muslims used to sit in the middle of each *durry*. The fourth dining committee was held at Dr. Ramachandra Ratha's house. During the fifth feast I suggested that a Muslim member cooked in the next feast. Many members objected to this proposal. Two important members of the committee, Mr Jagannath Tripathy and Mr Balakrushna Mohapatra, who happened to be Brahmins, did not agree with it and this made me depart from the committee.

Marriage of My Eldest Daughter, Ushamani

A man named Chintamani Kar lived next to the house of my father-in-law in Purushottampur Sasan near the Dhanamanadala Railway Station. He had five daughters and a son. He was very fond of his only son Damodar Kar. He was studying in the Badachana Minor School which lay near his village. My cousin worked as the headmaster in that school. He found the physique as well as the behaviour of Damodar to be very satisfactory and asked me to get my eldest daughter Ushamani married to him. My father-in-law, mother-in-law and my wife also insisted on this proposal as they knew this boy from his childhood. Ushamani was eleven years old then. My wife sent me from Cuttack to fix this marriage. I went to Chintamani Kar's house. My father-in-law and my cousin also accompanied me because they feared that I may break this proposal as they were quite acquainted with my nature. The two of them, I and Chintamani Kar sat in one room. After some time I asked both

of them to keep seated there and took Chintamani Kar to his backyard and told him the following:

'Others generally create misunderstanding among friends and even make them quarrel. They mislead them by saying whose behaviour is good and whose is bad. There are many who try their best to behave better than others for they fear that their importance would get diminished otherwise. So we must care for the actual welfare of each other and must not spend unnecessarily to follow blind beliefs fearing social criticism.' I explained to him how people become bankrupt by spending unnecessarily on jewellery, ceremonials and gifts for relatives (Bandhu Bevara). I also gave him some instances of rich men who had become paupers due to this extravagance. He himself had got three of his daughters married and had loaned a lot of money to meet the marriage expenses. Hence he understood me quite well. He was also aware that I had freed my family from debt and about the kind of life I led in Cuttack with my family. He gave his consent that we would not spend unnecessarily on jewelleries and rituals in the marriage. I said to him, 'Let us promise this to each other here by keeping God as the witness that we wouldn't spend anything on *Mahaprasad* during the engagement ceremony.' There we made this promise to each other. When we returned from the barn, my father-in-law and my cousin asked us what we had been discussing. I said, 'There is no need for anyone to know anything regarding what we discussed because you may not like the proposal we have agreed upon and the marriage proposal may not proceed any further for that reason. You should only know this much that we have fixed the marriage. We have already promised to each other regarding this on the name of God.' They said, 'All right if you have made some promises, but according to norms you have to perform the engagement ceremony.' I said, 'We have also promised that we wouldn't spend anything in the engagement ceremony.' They said, 'Even if you don't spend anything, you have to invite some people from the village and celebrate the occasion.' Accordingly, we had to blindly observe the *Mahaprasad Nirbandha*

the very next day. My cousin became the *Karta* (karmare basile). My son-in-law's mother and grand mother were deeply hurt when they saw him performing the *Karma* wearing old clothes. I also felt sad when I came to know that they had been hurt by this, but I said to myself that one should tolerate all these unhappiness for the sake of the welfare of the society. A leader-like man called Jadunath Kar (who happened to be the cousin of Chintamani Kar) from among the villagers, who were attending the marriage rites, said, 'We won't accompany the bridegroom's party without a feast.' I answered to this saying, 'The people in the bride-groom's party only go to create a scene in the marriage. I don't see any reason why you should accompany the bridegroom on the day of the marriage.' The gentleman got very angry and left the place at once. He did not also accompany the bridegroom's party during the marriage. Only about 2-3 near relations of Chintamani Kar and 2 or 3 men from his village had accompanied the bridegroom's party. Cakes made of ghee, puris and fish were not served in the meal during *alipana sabha* and *sankhudi sabha*. I was also against serving fish during social functions. Because, I myself had given up eating fish and meat as I had already been a member of the Brahmabidya Samiti. My intention behind this was that, one should stop extravagance in ceremonials from the root in order to eradicate such practices from the society. No one reacted to this as they were all very well acquainted with my nature. According to traditions the father of the bridegroom was supposed to give some ornaments to his daughter-in-law the day after the marriage. This tradition is blindly followed in many places even now. As was decided by us earlier, the father of the bridegroom had not brought any jewellery with him. Many people ticked him off for this as they were not in the know of the oath that he had taken to revolt against gifting jewelleries. According to the prevalent norms, the bridegroom stayed at my house for seven days. The day he was supposed to return to his house, my wife said to me, 'All right if you didn't give any gifts to the bridegroom, but make sure that the barber escorts him. It would be better to send a pot full of sweetened rice

flakes/*ukhuda*, some cheese and molasses of about four *annas* with him. Or, at least send some sweetened rice flakes of two paise.' I said, 'I will be breaking my promise if I did so.' The barber escorted the bridegroom with empty hands. They did not get a bullock cart, as it was a rainy day. My wife and my mother were deeply hurt when they saw that the barber was accompanying the bridegroom with empty hands. All the people in the bridegroom's village got terribly angry when they saw the bridegroom coming to the village like that after the *Saptamangala*. Everyone in the bridegroom's family was hurt by this. They did not ask the barber to take bath or eat there. The barber returned home in an empty stomach and recounted his experience to us. I did not get disturbed by this because I understood that it was natural for the angry villagers and the in-laws of Ushamani to scold me and not to feed the barber. I came back to Cuttack after some days. Four or five days before my arrival there, my wife went to my in-law's house with the two daughters. Ushamani's in-law's house lay adjacent to my in-law's house. When people objected to see a married lady without any ornaments, Ushamani's mother-in-law took some ornaments with her to my in-law's house and gave them to Ushamani to wear. On my going there, I heard everything about it and saw Ushamani wearing gold jewellery. My in-laws had heard the swear words that Ushamani's father and his villagers had hurled at me after the bridegroom's return. I told them that Ushamani's father-in-law had promised to me the day before the engagement that he would not blindly imitate the traditions and spend unnecessarily on the marriage. It was not fair on his part to scold me like this after making this promise. We will not accept anything from Ushamani's father-in-law until he accepts his fault and apologizes. They understood me. I took out all the ornaments off Ushamani, kept them inside a piece of apparel and returned them to her father-in-law. I did not say anything to him regarding his scolding me because I knew that he had no fault in doing so. I told him that Ushamani was not used to wearing jewelleries, and she also did not want to wear any. He kept the jewelleries with him and then we came back to Cuttack.

My wife died on 25 December 1925 at twelve O' clock in the night almost two years after this marriage. My mother was staying in my official quarter after returning from Puri. Doctor Kuntala Kumari loved my wife very much and she addressed her as aunty. She was a doctor. She told me in the afternoon of the day of my wife's death that aunty (my wife) would not survive for long. I could make out that my wife would die that evening; so I brought *rasgoolas* and some snacks from Puri for my children and gave it to them to eat. I thought if my children would go to bed early after eating, they would not know about their mother's death and would not be heart-broken for it. My mother was deeply hurt but if I had died instead of my wife, my widowed wife and my children's future would have become bleak.

God is very kind, whatever he does is meant for our well-being. Everyone suggested to me that my daughters lived with my mother. But I knew very well the conditions in which girls lived in villages and the kind of education they received there. So I did not pay any heed to anyone and kept my daughters in the hostel of Revenshaw Girls School. Those days a girl living in hostels – especially a married girl – was beyond anyone's imagination. Ushamani's mother-in-law and father-in-law tried their best to take Ushamani to their home. Many meetings were held in his village against me. Ushamani's father-in-law and his villagers threatened me many a time saying that they would get Ushamani's husband married somewhere else. I said to him, 'I will myself choose another bride for your son because, without my consent no one would give his daughter in marriage to your son.' The villagers became livid to hear this from me. Ushamani's father-in-law did not move from there because he knew me very well. I said to him, 'It was not fair on your part to bring the villagers with you instead of coming alone. Whenever I feel that appropriate time to send my daughter to her in-law's house has arrived, I would send word to you. Can't you see the number of girls of about 13-14 years of age, who die during child birth and the number of girls that lose their youth very early after delivering 2 or 3 children?

And don't you know what a large number of them suffer from fatal diseases throughout their lives? Another thing is that, you are burdened with a lot of debt over/on you. I wouldn't send my daughter to your house until you pay off all your loans. I know very well that there is no happiness in a family which is in debt.' He knew my ideals (manobruti) very well and how strictly I adhered to them. Hence he was forced to sell half his arable land and paid off his debt. Usamani and Nishamani lived in the boarding school for almost three years. I decided to send Ushamani to her in-law's house when she reached her seventeenth birthday, and sent word to them regarding it. Ushamani's in-laws were eagerly waiting to take her home. They did not show any objections to my sending my daughter without fixing any auspicious date. Ushamani's father-in-law reached my quarter on the day I had fixed to take my daughter with him. Ushamani, Nishamani, he and I went to the Cuttack railway station riding a coach. Ushamani brought a little trunk with her where she kept her clothes during her stay in the boarding school. I gave her a bigger trunk after some days. Love ceases to exist between a father and a daughter and even friends when a father blindly follows the traditions and gives his daughter all the things that he is supposed to give during the marriage and then does not keep in touch for the rest of his life. I had realized it to an extent that day. These days I feel it to a large extent. True affection has vanished completely now. Whatever little affection (tathakathita) is seen, is dependant upon a give and take relationship.

Ushamani's in-law's house lay at a distance of about one mile from the Dhanamandal railway station. A sawari/palanquin had been brought for Ushamani. According to traditions *barakoli* leaves and *arua* rice was placed in her hands. When Ushamani and Nishamani sat inside the palanquin, its door was closed from outside. No matter how much I objected to it, Ushamani's father-in-law did not pay any heed to me. I stopped objecting in the end because I understood that no one would listen to me. Ushamani's father-in-law and I walked to the village. The two daughters of mine came out of the palanquin in

a usual manner without a veil over their heads just as they lived in the boarding school. Many people came to know that the bride had come without a veil, ornaments, bhara or gifts. Many of them had gathered near Ushamani's in-laws house to see all these. Those who saw it exaggerated it before others, hearing these many women from nearby villages came there even the day after that to see it.

The day following Ushamani's arrival, her mother-in-law put a pair of mallas/thick anklets in her ankles and a pair of bataphala in her arms. I was present there. When Ushmani told me that she can not wear these ornaments, I said, 'Do not object to whatever ornaments they are giving you to wear now. Take them out after some days as per your convenience.' She lived in her in-law's house for about two months then I brought her back to Cuttack. After spending two months in Cuttack she returned to her in-law's house. The incident during Ushamani's first journey to her in-law's house was still bothering me – the palanquin doors were closed against my wish. This time I did not inform Ushamani's father-in-law about the day and time of Ushamani's return. If they had been informed, they would have sent a palanquin to the station and have closed its door during the journey. I went to the Dhanamandala station with Ushamani during the day and we both walked almost a mile within villages from the station and reached our destination. Ushamani's father-in-law was sleeping in the living room. He opened the door at my knocking it and was taken aback to see Ushamani with me. Ushamani's mother-in-law and some other women hurled abuses at me for doing so. I did not blame them for cursing me. After a few days I went to Ushamani's in-law's house with my youngest daughter Nishamani and Bhima Babu's wife Surama. I will introduce Bhima Babu and his wife Surama to you later. My purpose behind it was to take Ushamani to a nearby village called Nuasasan and to tell the women staying there against putting up veils and wearing jwelleries. The four of us set off in the morning. Ushamani's mother-in-law followed us. When we crossed the door, Ushamani's mother-in-law tugged her sari and held it tightly so that she could not come with us.

As a result the three of us went to village Nuasasan and returned after a short while.

Marriage of My Youngest Daughter, Nishamani

I had to fight a lot with the society in order to get my eldest daughter Ushamani married at a very young age by following the conventions. So I promised to myself that I would not get my youngest daughter married until she reaches sixteen years of age. I printed a memorandum and got it signed by some cultured and educated young men. The memorandum read, 'I would not get married to any girl below sixteen years of age.' Some young men signed it but none of them was able to keep his promise. Many of my friends and many conservative Brahmins objected to the fact that I kept my daughter unmarried till she was 14-15 years of age. If anyone ever enquired its reason, I answered them in a humorous vein saying, 'I had got her married at the age of ten. But she became a widow just a few days after her marriage.' Once I took her to Ushamani's house. There, my sister-in-law said to her, 'Your father is but a fool that he is roaming around with you for so many years (bapa sina olu je ete barsha jaen tate sangare nei buluchhi). No one from the Brahmin society would ever marry you. You will suffer all your life; can't you realize it for yourself?' Her words hurt Ushamani to such an extent that after returning from that place she kept herself confined to the corner of a room. She did not take bath or food and stopped going to school. When I asked her the reason behind this she wrote in a letter verbatim whatever my sister-in-law had told her and handed that letter over to me. In the letter she also wrote, 'I won't go to school if you don't get me married.' I understood the simplicity of her nature and said, 'I will look for a bridegroom for you within this year and get you married; you concentrate on your studies as before.' She believed that whatever I said, I translated that into action. So, after my telling this to her, she went to school as before. From that day I started searching for a bridegroom for her. I sent news/word to a candidate through an intimate friend of mine. My friend collected information from the candidate and told me, 'This candidate would marry your

daughter if you give 500 rupees in cash as dowry. It would be a good proposal.' I replied, 'Yes, I will give 500 rupees in cash. But if the bridegroom or my daughter dies after two or three months of the marriage, would someone return that amount to me? If you want to turn marriage into a business of give and take then make it a complete business. Only half of it can't be friendship while the other half is business altogether.' He did not say anything to me after hearing this. This proposal got broken. After some days, I went to see the Cuttack College Hostel with my daughter. A student named Laxman Mishra was studying B.A. and was living in the hostel. He expressed his wish to become a member of the Women's Welfare Committee. After some days, I understood/came to know from his letter that he intended to marry my daughter Nishamani and for that purpose he wanted membership in the Committee. I gave my consent to the proposal because no young lady had got married in the Brahmin Society in Orissa up to that time and because this candidate had no objection to marry young girls. After some days he asked me to get the marriage materialized. But there was still 4 - 5 months to go for Nishamani to reach her sixteenth birthday at the time. I had made a promise that I would not get my daughter married before she reaches this age. So I asked Laxman Mishra to wait for 4-5 months. He said, 'If Nishamani herself comes to me and agrees to marry me, I will wait.' When I did not agree to this proposal of his, Laxman Mishra tried to frighten me saying, 'Then I take my word back.' To this I replied saying, 'I also take my word back.' For two to three days following that incident, Laxman Mishra sent some gentlemen to me. I said to them, 'I have already taken my promise back, I can't commit to it again.' Then Laxman Mishra requested the principle of his college to write to me regarding the matter and made many an attempt as this to persuade me. But I was too obstinate to break my promise. I wanted to look for other candidates. I had some contacts with Sri Bhagirathi Mohapatra and his family when I was studying in Baripada. He was worked as a Deputy in Baripada. From among his five sons he had got his second son married to a young Bengali

Brahmin girl. So I thought that he would not say 'no' to get his other sons married to young girls. I wrote to him proposing a marriage between his 3rd son Mahesh Chandra and Nishamani. In his answer he wrote, 'I have no objections to get my son married to young girls. I myself will go to Cuttack and see your daughter after some days.' Without awaiting his arrival I went to Baripada with Nishamani to meet him. A gentleman from our village called Narayan Barik worked there as an auditor. I had special feelings for him as his father and brothers worked in our house as barbers. I lived in his official quarter after arriving in Baripada. When Bhagirathi Babu got news regarding our arrival, he reached there to invite us to his house to stay there. I did not think it appropriate to stay in his house. The next day morning Nishamani and I went to his house to pay a visit. Nishamani did not know that we had come to look for a bridegroom for her. We stayed at his house for about three hours. Bhagirathi Babu's wife, his daughters and daughter-in-laws got an opportunity to see and interact with Nishamani. When we were getting ready to return, Bhagirathi Babu invited us to dinner that evening. So we went there again in the evening. I found out that Bhagirathi Babu had arranged for a feast and had invited about twenty-five people. Both of us participated in that feast. From this arrangement, I could guess that everyone in his family agreed to this marriage. It was but natural for them to agree as all in his family were very cultured. The next day morning Bhagirathi Babu sent for me again. He and a government lawyer of that place, Mr Lalmohan Pati, asked me about my decisions regarding this marriage. I recounted to them the incidents of my eldest daughter's marriage. They came to know that I was against spending on dowry, jewelleries and ceremonials and that my main purpose of establishing a Women's Welfare Committee was to oppose these. Even after hearing all these things from me, Mr Lalmohan Pati entered into an argument with me. He said, 'Jwelleries are the most precious assets of women. People can make both ends meet by mortgaging ornaments during difficult times and ornaments also enhance the beauty of women.' I opposed him saying, 'Even if you have jewellries worth thousands of rupees, it doesn't equal to even one rupee. I have

seen that whatever ornaments people from middle class families make, they end up either mortgaging or selling them off. The loss that a woman suffers when one takes away her ornaments and mortgages or sells them is even more than the suffering of death. So why should I spend money and make ornaments and then mortgage it later when I run out of money? If ornaments are needed in order to enhance beauty, then they should be made by the husband for his wife. It's not the responsible of parents or in-laws to gift ornaments.' He argued again, 'The Bengalis have become so advanced today by taking money from their in-laws as dowry and then spending that money on their education.' To this I replied, 'What you consider to be advancement is not really advancement. Even if it is some kind of progress, I wouldn't feel sorry if our Oriya race remains illiterate and unadvanced as before. I wouldn't feel sorry even if the Oriya race gets destroyed. But it is against my conscience to turn the responsible and sacred relation of marriage, which is based on friendship, into business transaction.' Bhagirathi Babu had kept quiet while we argued this way. When he was asked to put forth his opinion he said, 'I will let you know about it later.' While returning from Baripada, Nishamani could perhaps sense that her marriage was being fixed with Bhagirathi Babu's third son Mahesh Chandra. While returning by train she said, 'We don't get to see such nice families in the Brahmin caste in Cuttack. Their lifestyle and behavior is very pleasant.' Some days after that incident the session's judge of that place, Mr Bidyadhar Mohapatra wrote a letter to me. The letter read, 'Bhagirathi Baboo's image would get tarnished if you don't give your daughter gold bangles, necklace and ear-rings during the marriage. People would not consider it proper if you don't give these ornaments to your daughter during marriage.' After getting the letter I thought that this proposal would not proceed any further. Bhagirathi Babu had close links with Sirastadar Raghunath Rao who worked in our Cutcherry. I showed the letter to him and requested him to write a reply to Bhagirathi Babu from my side telling him that it was against my conscience to do so. He got annoyed with me and said, 'You are

going to establish your relations with a Deputy Magistrate. If you can't give your daughter this much in her marriage, I also can't write anything for you.' Bidyadhar Babu and I shared one room in the boarding school while studying together. We also shared a great bond with each other at that time. I wrote to him, 'I have already told Bhagirathi Babu in the presence of Lalmohan Pati that I wouldn't promise anything in support of giving dowry or jewelleries. You please ask Bhagirathi Babu whether he has forgotten everything that I had told him. Please ask him to fix the marriage date and inform me by writing to me.' I waited for at least two months. But I did not get any reliable answer from Bhagirathi Babu. So I was forced to go to Baripada again and stay at Narayan Barik's quarter as before. I had softened a little during this visit of mine. I thought, if not gold necklace and ear-rings, I would give my daughter gold bangles in marriage. And that I would spend a good amount on these. I think that gold bangles are not ornaments because bangles and vermilion are necessary for married women. The next morning I got up at four o' clock and found that my previous weakness for giving bangles to my daughter was no more there. I thought well over the matter and decided that I could not give gold bangles to my daughter in the marriage. Let the marriage proposal get broken but I would never break my promise. I told Narayan Barik about my decision and made myself stern before going to Bhagirathi Babu's house.

I also asked Bidyadhar Mohapatra and Bhagirathi Babu's brother-in-law, Kapila Mishra to accompany me to his house. I had asked them to find out from Bhagirathi Babu whether he would proceed further in the proposal or not. I wouldn't say or listen to anything more (than that). Accordingly, Bidyadhar Babu asked Bhagirathi Babu, 'Bairagi Mishrra only wants to know whether you would proceed further in the proposal or not. He has told both of us that he wouldn't talk about anything else. You just say whether your answer is "yes" or "no".' Bhagirathi Babu answered, 'It took me so long to answer as I was busy building my house. I have fixed the marriage on the coming month of Magha.'

Immediately after hearing this from Bhagirathi Babu, I said, 'Then bring the *panji* and fix the marriage date.' The *panji* was brought in and the marriage date was fixed. Then I asked Bhagirathi Babu, 'How many people will accompany the bridegroom? Should a *baradhara* come from our place? Would a priest and a barber also accompany you?' Bhagirathi Babu replied, 'The Priest and the barber needn't accompany us. The bridegroom's party wouldn't exceed six to seven people, and there is also no need for a *baradhara* to come from your place' etc. I said, 'Please write down on a piece of paper whatever is decided among you and me because people may not believe me later.' He said, 'It's time I went to the Cutcherry. I would write to you from there.' His peon brought me a letter when I was buying a ticket in the Baripada station. I became happy to get the letter. The letter read, 'As was decided this morning, the *Baradhara* need not come. Only a letter of invitation will do. Our number will not exceed seven. You will arrange the priest and the barber.' On the marriage day the bridegroom and his party arrived in the morning and stayed in a quarter rented near my quarter. I had appointed a Brahmin cook to make breakfast for them but he left and went somewhere else. It was not easy to get Brahmin cooks in that *tithi* as many marriages took place during that time. So the bridegroom's party came and had their tea and breakfast in my quarter. I had decided to bring eight to ten meals for them from the hotel but Mr Jagannath Rao, who lived near my quarter and Mr Balakrushna Kar of the Saraswat Press and some other gentlemen, asked me not to do so and made cooking arrangements for the bridegroom's party. Balakrushna Babu's cook did all the cooking. I insisted Bhagirathi Babu on accepting the amount spent on the party's transport. But he did not accept it. He said, 'It would be a matter of shame for me to accept the amount spent on our travel expenses. If you want to give something then it would be better to give a wrist watch to the bridegroom.' I asked them how much it cost. A son-in-law of his, Shri Brahmananda Das, showed the wrist watch he was wearing and said, 'This cost me 50 rupees.' I gave 50 rupees to Brahmananda

Babu and he bought a wrist watch for the bridegroom with that amount. We printed invitation cards which bore the title 'Ideal Marriage of a Young Girl' and invited many gentlemen both Brahmins and non-Brahnins. At 12 P.M. Bahagirathi Babu asked me, 'Have you hired a car for the bride groom?' I said, 'No, I haven't hired any cars. I didn't think it was necessary because my quarter is very close to the place where the bridegroom is and because the bridegroom and his party are constantly sauntering across my house.' He said, 'You have to arrange a motor car or we will be laughed at in the society.' Haramohan Pattanaik and Sukant Rao were close friends of mine. I sent word to them to arrange a motor car but I could not get one. I was wandering on the road in front of my house in depression as I was unable to arrange a motor car. Serendipitously, a friend of mine called Chakradhara Mishra from Dhenkanal, passed me in his motor car about half an hour before the marriage. He stopped his car when I signaled him to do so. He kept my request and brought my son-in-law to my quarter in his car. The marriage began exactly at 2 P.M. as was scheduled and written on the marriage invitation card.

Many people came to see the marriage as it was the first marriage of a young girl (jubati) in the Brahmin caste. Some Brahmins, who were present at the marriage alter, asked, 'Will all the rites like *Chaturthi*, *Saptamangala* and *Barshabrudhi* get extincted from the Brahmin society?' To this, I replied saying, 'All right then. The priests will recite the chants of all these rites.'

Some days before this marriage, I had filed a case in the court against child marriage in the year 1932. And the Magistrate of that case, Marwood sahib, had fined both the bride's father and the bridegroom's father an amount of 100 rupees. He gave that amount to the Women's Welfare Committee later as prize money. So none of my relatives had objected to the marriage of young girls and they had all participated in the marriage.

The bride sat in the marriage altar without a veil on her head and kept the end border of her sari near her neck as she used to keep it before marriage. Many people attending the marriage did not like

it and told me many things regarding it. Sukanta Rao and Raghunath Rao of the Brahmin society told me, 'In our society, and also in the Christian society, the bride puts a veil over her head even if she doesn't cover her face. You should have done it too. But you disregarded everyone's views and chose a path which is all together different.' I said, 'I'm not blindly following any society and I'm also not going to do so. Why shouldn't the bride dress up in the way she used to do before her marriage? Why should she be asked to put a veil on her head on the marriage altar? I think the tradition of women putting up veils over their heads has emerged from the marriage altar. Whatever I have done is meant for eradicating the tradition of putting up a veil and for preserving the sacredness of marriage.' This way Ushamani's marriage was completed in the Women's Welfare Committee. At that time 5 or 6 young ladies, who wanted to get married, were living in the ashram. Another girl arrived there during the afternoon of the marriage day. She was a widow of about twenty-one years of age. She lived in the ashram from that day.

Normally the brides are sent to their in-law's house the day after their marriages. While fixing the marriage, I had settled with Bhagirathi Babu that it was not convenient on the part of the father of a bride to send his daughter to her in-law's house that day. Hence, I wouldn't follow the traditions blindly and would send my daughter to her in-law's house after 2 or 3 months according to my convenience. Everyone from the bridegroom's party returned to Baripada after the marriage. During their departure I handed over 50 rupees to Bhagirathi Babu and said, 'Do whatever is necessary with this amount. I wouldn't give anything more than this while sending my daughter to your place. People send their daughters to their in-law's house by deciding an auspicious time in the *panji*. But I don't believe in that.' Almost two months after the marriage I went to Baripada with my daughter. When we were about to reach the Baripada station, Nishamani took the end border of her sari which lay near her neck and put it over her head in a way so that I would not find out anything about it. She

perhaps thought that I would object to her doing so. I kept quiet as if I did not notice anything because to do so was but natural on her part.

While fixing the marriage I had also said Bhagirathi Babu that he should bring a cotton sari for the bride instead of a silk one and I would also make two cotton clothes for the bridegroom. Bhagirathi Babu had blamed me later for I forgot my promise and made silk clothes for my son-in-law. I accepted my fault.

The Women's Welfare Committee and Court Caseson Child Marriage

In 1930, I established a committee called the Women's Welfare Committee. Its objectives are given below:

1. Prohibition of extravagance on jewellery and ceremonials.
2. To fight against traditional systems like veil and purdha.
3. To condemn the custom of dowry.
4. To eradicate illiteracy of women.
5. To advocate in favour of village/small scale industries.

A few days after the establishment of this committee, the child marriage prohibition Act (The Sarada Act) was accepted. If some educated people had followed the example of marriages of young girls after the formation of this Act, I would not have to file any court cases. But I was bound to file some court cases against child marriages when I saw even highly educated men breaking the law and indulging in such marriages. Before filing the first court case I consulted 2-3 gentlemen and asked them to help me. They said that I would lose my popularity by doing so. In other words, the good opinion that people held about me, will come to an end. One of the gentlemen told me, 'You will have to face a lot of difficulties if you file a court case.' But I did not listen to anyone. Mr Bhimacharan Chaudhury, who ran the Utkal Tanary Shoe Shop in Balu Bazar, helped me a lot in this regard. I knew that if I filed a case against a rich man, it would be difficult to produce evidence of the marriage

in the court. So I decided to file a case against a poor man in the muffoussil. The advocate said that the bride must have seen the person who would become the complainant of the court case. So I decided that Bhima babu should become the complainant from the Women's Welfare Committee as he was a government employee.

Once I got news that a poor man in the muffoussil was getting his girl child married. So I went to see the bride with Bhima Babu. In order to reach that place, one had to walk through a long road. Evening had set in by the time we reached our destination. After reaching there we could not decide what we would say to the father of the bride and how we would get a glimpse of the child-bride. Hence when we reached there, Bhima Babu said to the father of the bride, 'We got astray and came here. Please show us the way that leads to the main road.' The father of the bride asked us to sit and brought us breakfast and paan. We stole a glimpse of the bride tactfully and came to know more about her from her father. The father of the bride escorted us till we reached the main road. That night we actually lost our way and faced a lot of trouble. We realized that it would not be easy to produce evidence regarding the marriage in the law court and gave up the idea of filing a court case against the marriage. A Brahmin from village Purushottampur, which lay near the Dhanamandal station, was getting his daughter married in her infancy. We filed the first court case against him. I myself could not become the complainant as I was having a goverment job. So Bhima Babu, being a member of the Women's Welfare Committee, filed the case, and fined 100 rupees to both the bride's and the bridegroom's father. Later on he awarded that amount to the Women's Welfare Committee.

People started to fear child marriages when they were fined 100 rupees for doing so. Many people (even educated people) besought my permission to perform child marriages. Many of them even offered me money for it. Many old men and women from Cuttack threw themselves at my feet and implored, 'I have made all arrangements for the marriage. The marriage is only 4 or 5 days to go. I wouldn't be able to see my grand daughter's marriage in my

lifetime.' I felt immensely heart broken on such occasions. Still, all of them had to return empty-handed. For a few days to follow, I could not get out of my quarter for fear of persecution.

I was forced to file another court-case after some days. In this marriage, the bridegroom was above fifty years of age. He had married a girl who was about eleven years old. Magistrate B.K. Sharma presided as judge over this case. He fined the bridegroom, the father of the bride an amount of 100 rupees each and the priest and the barber 50 rupees each. This way the fined money amounted to 300 rupees. The magistrate gifted 100 rupees out of that amount to the Women's Welfare Committee. I filed another court-case in Sharma sahib's court. The defendants resided in Adhanga Sasana. They said (jabab dele) that no such marriage had been performed (bibaha karma adau hoinahin boli semane jabab dele). Sharma sahib could make out that it was not possible to prove that case. Because, according to the Hindu Marriage Act, one has to show evidence of *satapadi* and other marriage rites being performed in order to prove the completion of the marriage. Bhima Babu, whom I have mentioned earlier, was the complainant in this case. Sarma sahib asked Bhima Babu to withdraw this case so he came to ask for my permission to do so. I said shouting, 'Don't withdraw the case even if the defendants go scot-free. I can't do what Sharma sahib says.' Sharma sahib overheard what I said. He explained the real thing to Bhima Babu and the latter withdrew the case. After a few days Sharma sahib got transferred to Puri and magistrate B. C. Mukharjee replaced him. We filed many cases in Mukharjee sahib's court too. In every court case the defendants had to pay a fine. After every court case Mukharjee sahib presented the Women's Welfare Committee either 25 rupees, or 20 rupees or 15 rupees for the expenditure it had borne to file the case. A stranger came to know that the Women's Welfare Committee was getting money for filing court cases and without telling me anything he filed a court case in Sharma sahib's court in Puri by introducing himself as a member of the Committee and became the complainant in that case. In this case Sharma sahib asked the defendants to pay

100 rupees to the Women's Welfare Committee. The defendant paid accordingly. When Sharma sahib was in the Cuttack court, he had understood that my objectives and the Women's Welfare Committee, both referred to me. He said to the defendants, 'I will myself handover this amount of 100 rupees to Bairagi Babu, the president of the Women's Welfare Committee, if you would bring him over here.' The helpless complainant had no way but to come to me that night. He said to me that he wanted to be a member of the Committee. Someone seeking to be a member of the committee had to pay 1 rupee. After paying that amount and receiving a printed receipt for it, he related to me what had happened in the court. I went to Puri with him and brought the said amount from Sharma sahib. I did not say anything to Sharma sahib about the treachery of the complainant. I gave 30 rupees out of that amount to him as he entreated me to do so.

In many a court case the accused produced false horoscopes of the brides and claimed that the brides had reached fourteen years of age. We asked such people to send the bride for medical examination. Magistrate Kartik Chand was judging one such case. He perhaps did not like the idea of sending newly married girls from Brahmin families for medical check ups. He took me to his chamber and asked me angrily, 'Have you got permission from either the collector or the commissioner to establish the Women's Welfare Committee?' I said, 'I don't feel there is any need to bring such permissions. I myself am the Women's Welfare Committee and I have appointed myself as its president. No meeting has been called for the execution of the committee and it will never be called for later. I am working for the welfare of my society just as I am working for the welfare of my family.' Kartik Babu got extremely angry with me and bade me good bye. Later on he investigated and found out that it was true of me to say that I myself was the Women's Welfare Committee. So he could not take any action against me. But he bore a grudge over me within. A few days after this incident, I was transferred from the Road Cess office to the Account's office. The purpose behind my transfer was

that I would have to work harder in the Accounts office and thereby I would not get any opportunity to do engage myself in working for the Women's Welfare Committee.

Revolt in the Cutcherry

I have already mentioned the reason why I was transferred from the Road Cess department to the Account's department. The office hour in the court was from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. I never went to the Cutcherry anytime except the working hour. After some days, there was a lot of work pending in my department. I got orders to finish the pending work in the office either in the morning or in the evening. Mr Bharat Ch. Nayak was the *hakim* at that time. I said to him, 'I think my health will deteriorate if I work beyond six hours in the office. I might work that longer if the doctor permits me (daktara jadi report karibe).' Bharat Babu kept quiet after hearing this. In another incident, everyone in the office was ordered to come in the morning as a lot of work remained pending there. Mr Tajmul Ali was the *hakim* at that time. When he came to know that I had not come to the office, he sent for me to his cabin and said, 'If you disobey my orders, I shall drive you out from the office.' I blurt out loudly, 'Whatever you have to do, please do that in pen and paper. I am ready to be dismissed. You have no right to speak to me like this. Please speak no further.' The deputy and others gathered at the place as I said this in a loud voice. Head clerk, Raghunath Rao and Deputy Raj Kishore Das also came running. Raj Kishore Babu said, 'Bairagi Mishra was already mad (Bairagi mishre ta jani suni pagal), now Tajmul Ali, the old Deputy, has also lost his mind.' Saying this he asked the head clerk to transfer me elsewhere.

Once I forgot to post a letter when I still worked in the accounts department. After my leaving the office, the head clerk, Bihari Babu reported to the Deputy in the first half that I had not posted the letter. Mr Bharat Ch. Nayak was the deputy at that time. He sent for me and lost his temper over me. I said to the head clerk in front of the Deputy, 'If you have already posted the letter, why did you report the matter to the deputy? You did this to show off how responsible

you are, didn't you? But I haven't done anything intentionally.' The Deputy became furious to hear this from me. I said again, 'You had once kept a telegram of the office in your coat pocket and had left it at your house. It was searched everywhere in the Cuttecherry but wasn't found. The day after that you found the letter from your coat pocket and brought that to the office. If you forget something, it is blameless, but my forgetting something is a crime!' Many people gathered in the court room as I said this in a very loud voice. Bharat Babu said, 'Bairagi Babu, you are disobeying the court. Do you realize it?' I had friendly relations with Baharat Babu so I walked up to him and whispered, 'I realize my fault. You please don't say anything more.' That day I appealed for a leave and Bharat Babu granted it without any objection. When the leave period was over, Bharat Babu expressed his unwillingness to keep me in the office anymore. This made the head clerk transfer me to the road cess office again.

School for Adult Women

I felt that there was a need to establish schools in villages in order to eradicate blind beliefs from the society and to eliminate the illiteracy of the women folk. So I discussed the matter with the Inspector of Schools, Mr Sukanta Rao and the Principal of Revenshaw Girl's School, Miss N. Nayak. Afterwards I convened a meeting in the Cuttack Town Hall and Miss N. Nayak presided over the meeting. It was decided in the meeting that initially one or two schools would be set up where an educated woman or a middle aged widow would be appointed to teach with a salary of about 10 rupees per month. The village women can abstain from their extravagances and contribute towards this salary.

Such a school was first established in Kadei village of Badachana police station. A middle aged widow named Ajodhya was appointed to teach there. Though she did not receive her salary for the first few months, she was never irregular in her duty. The middle aged women in the village said, 'Why on earth should we go to school now?' I said to them (be it right or wrong), 'Even if you wouldn't get any benefit out of it in this life, it would benefit you in your next

birth. You would become more intelligent than others in your next birth. And you would be able to learn quicker in your next birth if you start learning now.'

I told them everything that I knew as being a member of the Brahma Bidya Committee. I said, 'Whatever good deeds one performs in this life, gets cultured after death and before getting rebirth and that person is born with more good qualifications in his/her next birth. My words succeeded in persuading some women of around 50 or 60 years of age and they took admission in the school and started reading the Oriya alphabet in the *Barnabodhak*. After some days the school got a grant of around 10 rupees every month from the District Board due to the attempt of Mr Sukant Rao. But it is a matter of regret that no one paid attention to the purpose for which I had established this school. Visitors from the Education department asked us to blindly follow the syllabus which was generally followed in lower primary schools. No one paid attention towards eradication of superstitions and blind beliefs from the society. The Secretary of that school, shri Banchha Nidhi Das, also did not want to keep in touch with me (kounasi sambandha rakhibaku chesta kale nahin). This school was closed after 3 years. Ajodhya Devi, who was teaching there earlier, took training from the widow's school in Cuttack and is now teaching in the Girl's School at Cuttack.

The Veil and the Pardah System

The house of the head master of Kothapada minor school, Shri Durga Charan Mohanty, stood at a distance of one mile from our house. We were good friends since our childhood. After the establishment of the Women's Welfare Committee I had gone to his house in 1930 or 31. Of late, he had married an educated girl named Mallimala. While Durga Charan Babu and I were having a chat in one room I noticed that Mallimala, standing near the door with a veil over her head, was listening to our conversation. I suddenly rose to my feet, tugged her veil down, and brought her near Durga Babu by pulling her arm (bahu). She was a daughter-in-law of a *karan* family. She was wearing a big nose-ring. Her face turned red when I did

this. That countenance is still fresh in my memory. I said to her, 'If you wanted to listen to our conversation, you should have sat near us and done so. I didn't like it when I saw you standing near the door like a thief.' Mallimala's mother-in-law saw that her daughter-in-law was sitting with us and got infuriated. Later on, Durga Charan Babu explained to her what my intentions were behind doing this. That day Mallimala took membership of the Women's Welfare Committee and stopped putting the veil over her head.

A meeting was called in a village named Kusumpur which lay near our village. Such a meeting was held there every year during Durga Puja. That year I was invited to the meeting. Bhima Babu's wife, Surama and my youngest daughter, Nishamani also accompanied me there. I saw that men and women were sitting separately and a screen made of bamboo sticks was hung in the middle. I discussed the matter with some people and after the commencement of the meeting I stealthily put the screen down without the knowledge of the women sitting there. Most of the women sitting there were educated and they held the view that blindbeliefs such as wearing jewelries and putting up veils should be eradicated from the society. So none of them objected to what I did. Some of them even came forward and took membership of the Women's Welfare Committee.

Against Casteism

A clerk named Narahari Sahoo came from Ganjam to Cuttack to interprete Telugu jamanbandis in the court. He was a cultured young man. His concern with cleanliness is rarely noticed either among the men of Brahmin Society or among educated people. He was also very well-behaved. He did not get an accommodation in any mess as he belonged to the Sundhi caste. Though he managed to get lodging in a mess after a long time, he was not allowed to touch anyone's food or drink there. When I came to know this from him I let him stay in my quarter. After a few days his newly wed wife also came and stayed with us. A cultured Brahmin youngman having an independent bend of mind named Bhimacharan Chaudhury had

qualified the matriculation examination. Though students having passed this examination used to get jobs easily those days, he hated doing a Government job and was working as a clerk in the tannery established by Mr Das for the welfare of the people of Orissa. He also brought his newly wed wife and came to stay with us. Bhima Babu's wife Surama and Narahari Babu's wife Nishamani were like daughters to me. They also lived in my quarter like two sisters. We – I, the two sons of mine, my youngest daughter and these two couples – stayed together like a joint family for three years. Surama and Nishamani listened to my advice and freed themselves from blind conventions like wearing ornaments and putting up a veil. Bhima Babu and Narahari Babu taught them to read and write. Whenever a friend or relation of mine or Bhima Babu came to my house, they went away and stayed outside when they came to know that a Brahmin and a Sundhi lady cooked together in the house. Then some widows and groomless child brides came to live in my quarter and Bhima Babu and Narahari Babu went and stayed elsewhere as my house turned into an ashram for widows (narimangal ashram). Now Narahari Babu is working in the criminal's court and Bhima Babu has opened a shoe shop named Utkal Tannery in Balubazar, Cuttack.

Bhima Babu's wife Surama died leaving behind two sons and a daughter. Bhima Babu has now married the 25 year's old widowed daughter of Jadunath Mishra of village Mauja, who worked as a clerk in the collector's Cutcerry. This widowed girl is now the mother of four sons and a daughter. The widowed girl mentioned in the chapter named 'Taking Pension' is no one other than this girl.

Giving up Wearing the Sacred Thread

My elder daughter's house is in the Jemadeipur Sasan which lies near the Dhanamandala Station. Once, when I had gone to her house I saw a young man of about 26 years named Kanduria who had not been able to cut his hair or shave himself for two or three years. His hair had got matted and he had developed scabieson his head. He had wrapped a dirty and tattered piece of cloth around himself and was roaming in the village half-naked. The children of

that village used to tease him by calling 'mad kanduria'. When I spoke with Kanduria, I came to know that he was not really insane. I asked him the reason behind his condition and came to know that when he was about 18-19 years old he had married a 14-15 years old girl. Unfortunately five or six days after the marriage, Kanduria became insane. He left home and ate at other people's house without taking into consideration of their caste or religion. The father of the girl waited for one year and then married his daughter elsewhere. After about 3 years Kanduria gained normalcy. His father had died by then. The *byabastha datas* and the Brahmins of that village asked Kanduria's paternal uncle to make him expiate. They said that they will have to spend more that100 rupees to do so.

When the children of the village heard that Kanduria's uncle was getting him atoned, they ran to the canal to see it since they knew that these two people were unable to spend money on doing the atonement. I could not get him shaved that day. After 2 or 3 days I again took him to that canal and got him shaved with a blade. I asked him to take a bath by rubbing soap all over his body. When he had finished, I gave him an old cloth to wear and asked him to follow me to the village. The *byabastha data* and some Brahmins of the village got angry to see this and threatened me saying that they would detain my elder daughter. They also asked kanduria's paternal uncle not to let Kanduria live in his house. Kanduria's uncle did not let him enter his house for fear of the Brahmins. He fed Kanduria on the varanda from that day and Kanduria started working in the field. After a few days Kanduria was taken ill. His mother was not allowed to touch him even during his sickness. He laid on that veranda in a careless condition. When Kanduria's condition deteriorated, his mother sought permission to nurse her son. But the *byabasthadata*s and the Brahmins did not grant her the permission to do so. Kanduria breathed his last lying on that veranda. His paternal uncle took and threw his body in the cremation ground. The Brahmins made Danei Behera atone himself as he had carried Kanduria's dead body on his shoulders. I heard all these when I went to the village some days

after the incident. I was shocked to know about the callousness of the Brahmins. I realized that the sacred thread that Brahmins wear has made the entire Brahmin race to be greedy, heartless and lazy. Before this incident I had already seen the betrayal of the Brahmins in places like Puri, Gaya, Kashi, Brundaban, and Prayag. They lived a sedentary life by sitting in a raised platform. They lose their characters as they never have to do any work. The sacred thread, which I was wearing before this incident, was used only for tying keys. Whenever I needed a thread, I made do by taking a piece out of it. The above incident led me to abhor the sacred thread.

Once, some relatives of a boy had come from different villages to attend his initiation/thread ceremony. When I was taking bath with these people in the canal, I related the aforesaid incident to them. I tore my sacred thread off and took an oath before them never to wear it again. I have never put on the sacred thread since that day. Whenever someone asked me the reason behind not wearing it, I explained to him, 'This very sacred thread has rendered the entire Brahmin race rapacious, cruel and men of loose character. But however bad a Brahmin might be, the respect given to him is not given to any non-Brahmin of good character. Men all over the world covet to have two things: wealth and respect from others. Why should a Brahmin toil hard to cultivate the field if he can easily earn good money by uttering a few lifeless chants which barely require any hard work? This makes him while away his time in indolence for months sitting on the raised platform and playing a game of cards or gambling or by eating *bhang*. Is not the need of the hour to abandon the sacred threads which turn Brahmins into an idle lot having immoral characters?'

Cutting Off the Pigtail

It tickles me when I see Brahmin men growing pigtails or Muslims growing peculiarly long beards. I also feel sorry to see these. A good many people follow these blind beliefs today, even after being a part of an educated society. Those, who grow pigtails, do not shave them even while getting tonsured during Dasahs/tenth day of a death

rite. I have asked many people to stop growing pigtails or long hair blindly. They have listened to me and have cut the horrid thing off.

Some 25 years ago, my elder daughter's father-in-law, Chintamani Kar had come to my official residence. He also grew a pigtail. I said to him, 'Why have you grown your hair like an uncivilized man? I find it very embarrassing to introduce you to anyone as my relative/samudi. Your son must also be feeling very awkward for it.' He understood my point and did not react to what I said. One day, when he was sitting in a chair, I cut his pigtail off with a pair of scissors. Afterwards I called a barber and got him properly shaved.

Mayadhar Mohanty of village Chandola was an acquaintance of mine. He had come to my official residence six or seven years ago. He, too, had grown a pigtail. I asked him many a time to cut it off (mu tanku aneka bujhaili). Even if he understood my point, he was reluctant to do so. I reasoned out that he himself would never be able to cut the pigtail which he had grown for so many years. So I myself cut his pigtail off one day. I kept that pigtail with me for a year with utmost care. Whenever someone came to my place, I would show him this pigtail and say, 'See, it's Mayadhara Mohanty's pigtail.'

A Brahmin gentleman had died that year (November 1956). On the tenth day of his death rites, I saw that all the five sons of the man, who had died, had got tonsured leaving a pigtail. Eldest of them all was about thirteen years old. When I explained to him that growing a pigtail was but a blind belief, he understood my point and let me cut his pigtail off with the help of a blade. I explained to his guardians that though they were not able to give up following the conventions, they must not let their children do the same. Someone said to me, 'Is any harm being done to others if one grows a pigtail?' I said, 'Although no financial or physical harm is being done to anyone, all these blind beliefs and customes unconsciously turn the children blind.'

Abstaing from Giving Gifts to Friends

Almost thirty years ago, I had once been to the Kumuda Market near our village. A Brahmin gentleman had died at a very young age near that place. He was survived by his wife, two sons and two daughters. When his younger brother's father-in-law got news about his death, he said, 'I already have to pay off a loan of 15 rupees which I had taken towards buying gifts recently. Now, I would have to spend the same amout on gifts again.' The man felt very helpless when he came to know that the wife of a close friend of his had also died this way. In my opinion, one must not spend anything on gifts for relatives, performing death rites or in observing other social occasions in order to show off.his/her greatness. If the person feels too ashamed for not spending anything on gifts for friends and relatives, he/she could give only one rupee to his friend as a token of the gift and could save his friendship. The man, whose wife died, could perform her death rites in a very simple way. But he finds it embarrassing to pay only one rupee because that would tarnish his image in the society. One, who gives more gifts, receives more respect from others and vice versa. I have always abstained myself from the practice of showing off my greatness by spending on gifts for friends and relatives in order to keep up my social status

Almost 12 years ago I had fixed a marriage in which the bridegroom's father could not make any demands for dowry. Hence, the father of the bride was very happy with me and insisted on my joining the bridegroom's party. To keep his request, I accompanied the bridegroom's party.

According to the prevalent traditions of the time, the bridegroom's party is allowed to see the bride's face and offer 2 to 5 rupees to the bride as gift. Although I was a strong opposer of this tradition, I had to commence the ceremony at other's instance that day. I offered only one anna towards seeing the bride's face. Many people objected to it and asked the reason behind my doing so. I replied/answered, 'Earlier people used to get girls of about 8-9 years of age married and pretend this way by presuming them to be dolls.

But such acting doesn't suit the marriage of young girls. Again, if giving something in exchange of seeing the bride's face is a sign of affection from elders, then what is wrong with giving only one anna? Just as offering too much in gift for flaunting one's social status is a crime, accepting the gift on the part of the bride's party by succumbing to greed, is a bigger crime than that.' Last year too, I was forced to see the bride's face in a close friend's house. I felt sorry to see that such conventions are blindly followed even today. I had to offer something towards seeing the bride's face at the instance of the women present there. I offered one anna towards it. I have gone to many people's houses to see the faces of brides afterwards, but never have I offered anything towards seeing the bride's face again.

Buying Ornaments on Loan

The clerks of the collectory cuttechery formed a cooperative society to facilitate loans. The society was named 'Ministerial Officers'. Almost all the clerks and peons became members of the society. The speciality of this society was that, members, who deposited 10 rupees, were allowed to take a loan of 100 rupees every month at the interest of 1 rupee. Generally, people took loans with an interest of 0/3, 0/6, or 0 paise per rupee every month and some times, if there was some more need, they took money on loan at an interest of 0/6 paise from the *kabuliwala* (A man named Mahendra Sujoga asked everyone to take loans at an interest of one *pahula*. Everyone asked me to take membership of this society so that clerks and peons, who failed to pay the interest and faced many troubles, would get some benefit through it. But I did not accept the proposal (to become a member) as it was against my morality to encourage taking loans. I noticed that people who never used to borrow money started to take a loan of 200 or 300 rupees. Some of them also took a loan with an interest of 1 rupee and lent that money to others with more interest. I found almost ninety clerks of the office taking loan this way. It is true that they got loan with a low rate of interest but gradually their urge to take more loans were on an increase.

A boy named Raghua from the Gauda caste was serving the Cutcherry as a guard. Everyone was fond of him. He, too, deposited 20 rupees in the society and took a loan of 200 rupees which he needed for his marriage. The Nazar of the cuttcherry and others working there made provisions for his doing so. Apart from this loaned amount, he borrowed some more money from other sources and celebrated his marriage with a little pomp and show. Again, everyone must have asked him to celebrate his marriage with such grandeur as he worked in the cuttcherry. He invited all the clerks of the Nazarkhana and other clerks, who had helped him in taking the loan, to a feast. I was working in the Nazarkhana then and had joined in the feast. While returning home after the feast some of us put forth the proposal saying, 'Raghua spent so much on a feast for us; we must collect money and buy his wife some ornaments with it.' Everyone agreed to this proposal but me. I said, 'I oppose the idea of taking money on loan, performing marriages in ceremonious manner, and buying gold ornaments. You already have done great harm to Raghua by helping him loan money. Let him pay off the loan by selling the ornaments that he has made for hi wife. It would be better for us to help him pay off the loan with the collected amount with which we would have bought his wife new ornaments.' Let alone any of them agreeing with my proposal, all of them scolded me for saying such a thing.

Compulsory Collection of Funds

Huge pandals are decorated in almost all the hamlets (pada) in Cuttack during Durga Pujas. Although people residing at the hamlets did not have enough to eat, they were forced to donate money compulsorily for setting up the pendals in fear of touts. I never contributed anything towards such collections as I considered them to be illegal. I lived in a rented house at Mahammadin Bazar and paid 17 rupees towards its rent. Those who occupied that house before me paid 4 to 5 rupees as donation. A Muslim man named Sankhi Khalipha and some other touts threatened me saying that I had better donated money; otherwise they would not allow me stay in the hamlet.

That day I came to know that Muslims also joined in decorating the pandal for Durga Puja in Cuttack. I said, 'I consider such compulsory collection of funds to be unjust. And I won't contribute anything towards an act which is unfair. I won't do so even if you frighten me to get me ousted from this hamlet for not paying you anything to buy alcohol.' Hearing the row between me and Sankhi Khalipha, many people gathered at the place. Shri Laxmi Narayana Sahoo, a member of Bharat Sebak Samiti, happened to pass my house at the time. He explained to the touts what my purpose was behind falling out with them, and gave them a book titled *Satyanusandhan* (the search for truth), which was written by me. They all left my house quietly. No one came to collect funds from me since that day.

Widow Marriage

'One whose husband/dhaba has passed away is a widow.

One whose groom has passed away is a groomless bride (bibara).'

'Groom' and 'husband' are two different concepts/terms. A groom becomes a husband only when the marriage rites are over. Until the marriage is over, one cannot call a bridegroom as one's husband. In our society, the marriage rites begin during *Kanyadaan* and are over on the day of *Durbakshata*. So couples, who get married, are called bride and bridegroom from the day of *Kanyadaan* till *Durbakshata*. Whatever rites are performed during these long four years, like 'Barsha brudhi', 'Chandra Bandapana' and 'Bibahanga', are used in the marriage chants. Under such circumstances, if the 'husband' is not yet there, how could he die and how could the bride become a widow? The person who died is the groom of the bride— he can never be the husband of a wife. To call such brides as 'widows' and their marriage as 'widow marriage' is completely baseless. Rather, it would perhaps be appropriate to call them 'groomless brides' and their marriage as 'marriage of groomless brides'.

Once, I got news that a 12 -13 years old daughter of a Brahmin gentleman, Sriram Das of Barada Sasan, P.S. Jagatsingpur, had lost

her bridegroom a few days ago. I went there to meet them. The daughter and her mother were sitting near the hearth and were crying incessantly. Seeing this, I said to Ram Babu, 'The girl will fall ill if she stays with her mother like this any longer. You please let me adopt her as my daughter and let her go with me to Cuttack. I will look for a bridegroom for her and get her married as soon as possible. Count on me.' Ram babu was an educated and cultured man. He understood me and the day after that he brought his daughter to my official quarter. I gave the girl bangles and vermillion to wear and let her lead the life of an unmarried girl. After about 6 months, Ram Babu took his daughter to his house again. The Brahmins of his village detained Ram babu when they found his daughter wearing bangles and vermillion marks. He was also not allowed to have the service of the washerman and the barber. Rama Babu got shaved on his own and washed his cloths all by himself. After two years Rama babu decided to get his daughter married to a candidate and brought her to the Women's Welfare Ashram for this purpose. The candidate, who had promised him to marry his daughter, went back on his decision/ promise at the last moment. After many further efforts, Chakradhar Satapathy of Village Satyabhamapur, P.S. Salepur, gave him word to marry his daughter. Their marriage took place in the premises of the Women's Welfare Ashram. Many ladies and gentlemen came to attend the marriage as it was the first marriage of its kind in the Brahmin caste. The Women's Welfare Ashram was conducting a marriage under the name 'widow remarriage' for the first time. Some conservative Brahmins had also come with the intention of creating obstacles for the marriage. When some of them asked me to show the consent of the *sashtras* for such a marriage, I said, 'I don't know anything about the consent of the *shastras* and I also don't see any reason why I should look for it in the marriage of these hapless girls. The keeper of a goat died, so I am making provisions for keeping the goat under the custody of another master. If I'm sent to hell for doing so, I accept it without any hesitations.' One of the gentlemen did not pay heed to what I said and started arguing with me. So, I asked him

to leave the place at once. After witnessing this incident, novelist Kanhucharan Mohanty wrote about it in his novel *Nispati* (The Decision). He dedicated the book to the Women's Welfare Committee.

A few days after this incident, I published a book, *Widow Marriage* showing the evidences from *shastras* for such marriages. Then it crossed my mind that it was not proper to call these girls as 'widows' whose *Durbakshata* rites had not been performed. This led to the publication of the book *Unreal Widows' Real Marriage*. I did not like such a long title and decided to replace it with a smaller and reasonable name. I read the marriage chants, *Manu Samhita*, and *Bashistha Samhita* and came to know that performing the *Kanyadaan* is not really the marriage samskar of the bride. From the marriage mantras/chants I found that the *Karmas* that are performed after the marriage like the *Chaturthi, Saptamangala, Chandra Bandapana* and *Barsha Brudhi*, and chants like '*abayorbara kanyayo bibahanga bastra granthi mochan*' are recited in them. From them I got a clear idea that the *Barsh Brudhi* rite, which is performed two years after the *Kanyadana*, is also a part of the marriage rites. Consequently I coined the word 'groomless brides' (bibara) to replace 'child widow' and wrote another book titled *Bibara Bibaha* (Marriage of groomless brides). Some conservative Brahmins and the Maharaja of Jaypur wrote many articles in newspapers and magazines saying that such new coinages should not be accepted. But no one objected to my doing so. The groomless brides got married in the Women's Welfare Ashram under the name 'groomless brides' marriage'. News about the marriage got published in all newspapers. The word 'Bibara Bibaha' (groomless girls' marriage) also got mentioned in Gopala Chandra Praharaja's Dictionary.

After the marriage of 6 or 7 groomless brides in the Women's Welfare Ashram, the head master of Mission School, Sri Mayadhar Das (aged 44-45), married a groomless bride of about 25 years of age. When others saw such a scholar well versed with the *shastras* marrying a groomless bride, they came to believe that such marriages were sanctioned by the *shastras*. Taking the cue from Mayadahar

Das, another gentleman named Bansidhar Kar form the same village married a 14-15 years old groomless bride from the Women's Welfare Committee. Then a 14-15 years old groomless bride named Nilamani from that village came to live in the Women's Welfare Ashram. Three or four months after that a 24-25 years old groomless bride from village Brahmapur, P.S. Salepur, wished to stay in the Ashram. So her paternal uncle, Mr Chinta Mani Acharya (a Deputy) wrote to me asking permission to let the girl stay in the ashram. I went to his house. The girl's mother sent me word asking me to stay elsewhere and also not to go to their house for fear of the villagers. I ignored her pleadings and went to their house. The girl's mother did not agree to send her daughter with me and suggested that she would send her to the ashram after a few days on a convenient day. After some days the girl came to the ashram accompanied by Chintamani Acharya's eldest son, Surendra and lived there. After staying there for almost a year, she was given in marriage to shri Krushna Chandra Mohapatra of village Kadalibana, P.S. Pattamundai. Krushna Chandra Mohapatra was an educated man; he had studied up to I.A. Now he works as a clerk in the Canal Revenew Office. His eldest son is pursuing his studies in medicine.

In my opinion, whether groomless brides get married or not, they should wear bangles and vermillion marks like unmarried girls. I let the groomless brides, that I bring from various places or those who themselves come to the ashram, wear bangles and vermillion marks and eat fish.

Once, I got information that a 13-14 years old girl from village Nua Sashan near the Dhanamandal railway station had lost her groom lately and was made to take out her bangles and wipe out the vermillion mark on her forehead. I went there, reasoned with the girl's parents and asked the girl's mother to give her daughter bangles and vermillion to wear. When she handed these over to me I made the girl wear them. When some conservative Brahmins objected to it, I said, 'Go on and take the bangles and vermillion mark off her, I have no objection to it. If the *shastras* permit us to make the girls

widows by taking their bangles and vermillion marks off, what do you wait for then?' While returning home, I met an important man from that village named Bimbadhar Acharya. He took me to his house and treated me with great respect. But he and some other Brahmins of that village said to me that it was unjust on my part to let/make the girl wear bangles and vermillion mark and to create indiscipline in the village. I said, 'If I am doing something unjust and that is not permitted by the *shastras* then why do you treat me with so much of respect instead of hatred?'

Almost after one year of this incident the girl's parents got her married. Some days after this marriage, the mother of another 15-16 years old groomless bride of the same village sent word to me regarding her daughter's marriage. I went there. The girl's mother was afraid of taking me to her house. I had to stay at someone else's house. The girl's mother came there and told me about her wish to get her daughter married again. I said, 'Does the girl's father give consent for the marriage?' The mother said, 'He doesn't at all agree to get her married again. That is why I didn't call you to our house. I'm a woman; I can understad the sorrow of widowhood very well. How can men feel the agony of women?' I learnt this new thing from that groomless bride's mother and remembered it for the rest of my life.

These days, after the prevalence of the marriage of young girls, educated people send their daughters to colleges for higher education. They ignore the opinion of mothers and remain completely disinterested regarding the marriage of their young daughters for years. When I see such practices these days, I remember the word of that groomless bride's mother. I am not saying anything for or against keeping young girls unmarried for years in order to get them educated. In my opinion, though our wives are uneducated and we on the otherhand are highly educated, we must always consult our wives regarding the marriage of our daughters.

I have already mentioned that two girls of Barada Sasan, P.S. Jagatsinghpur, had got married from/at the Women's Welfare Ashram

after staying there for some time. Another mother of a 16-17 years old groomless bride from that very village sent word to me that she would send her daughter to the Women's Welfare Ashram. When I reached their place/village, I came to know that the girl's father was not in the know of the matter. In the ignorance of the father, the girl's mother and some other women of the village brought the girl up to the Barada Motor Stand according to my instructions. I took the girl with me to the Women's Welfare Ashram. She was given in marriage after one year.

It was decided that the marriage of the 3 groomless brides staying at the ashram would take place on 27th November, 1933 of Margasira tithi and invitations were printed and sent accordingly. But due to some unavoidable problems, the marriage of one girl, named Labanyabati (Basanti), could not be held on the appointed date and was procrastinated to a later tithi on 9th December. The marriage of the other two groomless brides took place at the crossroads in front of the ashram on one altar. The marriage rites were performed by two different priests. According to my instructions, the priests pronounced the marriage chants loudly and the women present there ululated. Seeing this, the people, especially women got the impression that such marriages were sanctioned by the *shastras*. A great number of people, who were not invited to the marriage, gathered there when they found that the groomless brides had not put up veils over their heads while the marriage rites were being performed. This led to traffic jam at the crossroads. Many ladies and gentlemen witnessed the marriage either sitting inside their vehicles or by standing outside. Ex-Deputy Magistrate, Mr Madhab Ch. Mishra and Ex-Advocate, Mr Janaki Nath Bose advocated many things in favour of such marriages to the crowd that had gathered there.

Madhab Ch. Mishra could not fight his tears back while giving the speech. He could not speak any further as his voice got chocked. But whatever he said, and the manner in which he said it, touched everyone deeply. An educated gentleman said to me there, 'You support the marriage of groomless brides. But, what about widows?

Won't those hapless women, whose Durbakshyata rites have been completed, ever get married again?' I answered, 'I am not saying that only groomless brides should get married again and widows shouldn't—what I preach for is that groomless brides should lead a life of unmarried girls. They shouldn't observer widowhood.' Hearing this, Janaki Babu replied, 'Yes, you are quite right. I fully support what you say.' Mr Madhab Ch. Mishra said that day, 'I will donate 1 rupee to the Women's Welfare Committee every month.' He sent either 4 rupees (donation of 4 months) or 6 rupees (donation of 6 months) to the ashram through money order until he breathed his last. 12 days after the marriage of these two girls, Basnti (mentioned earlier) got married on the same altar. Editor of the monthly magazine *Sahakar*, Mr Balakrushna Kar, who had witnessed these three marriages, wrote his views on them in an article in his magazine (which is given below) reading which many groomless brides came to stay in the ashram with the intention of get married again.

(Published in the Sahakar)

The Women's Welfare Committee and Reforms in Marriage

It is a good news not only for the city of Cuttack, but for the whole of Orissa that the Women's Welfare Committee is carrying out tumultuous campaigns in order to eradicate blind beliefs and unreasonable conventions from the society under the leadership of Shri Bairagi Ch. Mishra. It is true that the ommittee came into existence in October 1936. But Bairagi Babu, a culture-loving man, had turned revolutionary much before when he witnessed injustice and suffering in the Hindu society and when he experienced such an oppressing atmosphere in the confine of his own family. After succeeding in bringing good culture into his own family, he established the Women's Welfare Committee in 1930 to achieve the same goal in his country. Though the committee has not done much progress in its promises in its 3 years short life span, whatever work it has performed so far is really praiseworthy. If one takes the committee's organizational success into consideration, one finds that

the number of members in the committee has not risen to the expectations yet. Bairagi Ch.Mishra has entered his field of work with the help of a few women workers and some other members. The difficulty one faces while eradicating blind beliefs from the Hindu Society, where illiteracy and blind beliefs has grown to such a large extent, need not be explained to anyone. But it is a matter of happiness and pride that Bairagi Babu is working all alone towards this cause. From this, one can easily deduce his courage, guts and dedication towards social reformation and the efficiency of his committee in achieving its goal.

Mention should be made here of what the committee has done regarding the culturation of marriage. Although the 'Sarada Act' for the prevention of child marriage has been passed, it has not borne any successful results yet. But it is a fact to feel happy that Bairagi Babu has stopped some child marriages from taking place in Brahmin families by threatening to file court cases against them. Thereby he has paved way for the marriage of young girls. Some marriages of young girls in the Brahmin caste took place in Cuttack and some other places in Orissa recently. There is no doubt that this was possible only due to the attempt made by the Women's Welfare Committee.

One cannot stop praising what the committee has done regarding bringing reform in marriage till date. Shri Bairagi Ch. Mishra has published many books through which he has presented a new fact before the common people. He has shown every one that girls, who get married in their childhood and become widows before reaching youth, are not actually widows and their re-marriage is not 'widow marriage'. He thinks it proper to call the marriage of such girls, whose bridegrooms died a premature death, as 'groomless brides' rather than 'widows'. Because, the bridegroom who died was not her husband at the time of his death. The bridegroom becomes the husband of the bride only after all the rites of the marriage get performed after the marriage, i.e. from the day of the engagement till the *Nishaka*. This fact is recited time and again in the marriage chants. The number of these underage groomless brides is no less

than the adult young widows. Like the marriage of unmarried girls, the re-marriage of such groomless minor brides is conscientious and permitted by the *shastras*. The Women's Welfare Committee has not just preached and published books regarding this, it has translated what it preaches into action to a considerable degree. In the marriage tithes of the month of last Margasira, three such marriages took place in the premises of the ashram. The photographs and identities of these newly married couples are given below for the information of the readers. (The three photographs published in the magazine couldn't be given).

Identity of the newly weds:

Bridegroom : Shri Raghunath Panda (Rudrapur)

Bride : Shrimati Nilamani Devi (Mulabasant)

Bridegroom : Shri Singhadri Panigrahi (Paralakhemundi)

Bride : Shrimati Basanti Devi (Nayagarh)

Bridegroom : Shri Banshidhar kar (Mulabasant)

Bride : Shrimati Padmavati Devi (Nuagam)

Many eminent and educated people and pundits of Cuttack attended the marriage and showed their sympathy to the committee.

The marriages were performed according to the rules and regulations of the Vedic marriage. Parents of families, where such widows live, should get their daughters married again. Even now, the committee brings such groomless little brides from the mouffosil areas and keeps them in the ashram in order to get them married. We believe that the president of the committee would not refuge helping the parents from the villages who need the committee's to perform such marriages. We hope that in near future such marriages would take place in every village and every house in Orissa. The Women's Welfare Committee has only shown the direction. Now the common people will have to follow the track; would it otherwise be possible for the committee to perform such marriages everywhere in the state?

Marriage of my Two Sons to Groomless Brides

Shri Bhagirathi Mishra of village Ranipada, P.S. Jagatsinghpur, had a 14-15 years old groomless bride. He wrote to me regarding the marriage of his daughter. He worked in the auditor's post in Patna at that time. I wrote him back saying, 'Don't worry about your daughter's marriage. I'll send you word after choosing a suitable bridegroom for your daughter. In case I fail to get a proper/good candidate, I would get her married to my eldest son.' I wrote this even though I had not seen the girl. Few days after that I went to see her. To my utter dismay I found that sorrow and suffering in malaria had robbed the girl of her good health. Although I was a little hesitant after seeing her, I decided to get my eldest son married to her as I had already given my word to it. A number of obstacles were created by my brothers and relatives in doing so (aneka badha dele). I got news that my mother was going to commit suicide. But I could not change my decision as I had already made a promise and my conscience did not permit me to do so. The marriage took place at Bhagirathi Babu's house in Ranipada. The bride groom's party included Mr Chakradhar Mohapatra of Narasinghapur, Sri Krushna Chandra Kar of village Mulabasanta and many Brahmin gentlemen from Cutack. Many Brahmins and brahmanottara gentlemen from the nearby Brahmin Sasan had joined in this marriage. I had already written to Bhagirathi Babu that he could not give even a mat or gold of even a gram in dowry. If he did so, I would set fire to all those. All the members of Bhagirathi Babu's family felt very sad as they could not send anything with their daughter at the time of her departure.

The Head Master of Academy School, Sri Bholanath Mishra used to preach against the marriage of groomless girls and also against me. He had adopted the daughter of his younger brother, Mr Janardana Mishra. The girl lost her groom when she was but 15 years old. Bhola Pandite came to the collector's cuttechery to meet me and said, 'My daughter lost her bridegroom only because I preached against you. No evidence sanctioned by the *shastras* had been able to put an impact on me till date. But now I have come to understand that such marriages

have the approval of the *shastras*. Now my only wish is to get my daughter married.' When the girl's father-in-law came to know that her father wanted to get her married again, he took the girl away with him by force and kept her in his house for about 3 years. When the girl returned home from her father-in-law's house, Bholi Pandite came to me again and said, 'I am not able to send my daughter to the Woman's Welfare Ashram for fear of social criticism. I will bring her to my quarter in Cuttack. And you may please take her with you to the ashram in my absence. Please don't let anyone know that I have given my consent to this. I will tell everyone that my daughter left home at her own will without letting anyone know about it.' A man from the pandit's house came to my ashram and asked me to bring the girl to the ashram. That was a moonless night of Deewali (dewali amabasys). The pandit had left by the time I reached his house. I brought the girl to the Women's Welfare Ashram. After she stayed there for 3-4 months, I got her married to my youngest son, Basant Kumar. The girl died leaving a daughter and a son behind. Few days after that Basant married another groomless bride from a village near Balikuda Police station. His second wife also had a daughter and a son by him.

Marriag of Groomless Brides and Widows in the Baisya Caste

Once, 2 or 3 culture-loving men from the goldsmith's caste took me with them to fix the marriage of a widowed girl aged 18 or 19 years named Narayani with Mr Sashi Bhusan Sahoo of Nabapatana. She was the daughter of Hadibandhu Sahoo of Mahammadia Bazar. I found that some conservative goldsmiths present there were creating trouble for the marriage to take place. No decision could be taken till 12 A.M. So I said, 'I can't stay here any more.' Hearing this, the troublemakers left the place. I said to those who supported this marriage, 'The girl is now over eighteen years of age and she can now get married according to her own will. There is no need to wait for anyone else's decision. Let's take some rest for 2-3 hours. I will take the girl to the Women's Welfare Ashram before dawn and get her married there.' Everyone agreed with what I said. At 4 o'clock in

the morning I sent for a horse driven carriage and brought the girl to the ashram. Next day morning, Deputy, Shri Sadhu Charan Sahoo and Shri Bhramarabara Sahoo came from the goldsmith's side and asked me to let the girl go. I said, 'The girl doesn't want to go from here. Now take her how you would like to take her with you. How can I evict her from the ashram?'

They went back after hearing this from me. Two days later, the girl was given in marriage to afore mentioned Mr Sashi Bhusan Sahoo of Nabapatana in the premises of the Women's Welfare Ashram. Many friends and relatives of the bridegroom from Nabapatana and many other ladies and gentlemen attended the marriage. A groomless bride named Bayani, who was the daughter of the head clerk of the Ravenshaw College, was present among the women who were attending the marriage. The day after Narayani's marriage, the bride, the bridegroom and others ate their meals and got ready to return home. I also left for the Cuttchery. This groomless daughter of Natabara Babu turned her mind not to return home and was hell bent on staying in the ashram among other groomless brides. I came to know this when I returned to the ashram at 4 o'clock. When I saw that the bride, bridegroom and his party were not able to return because of the Bayani, I asked her to go with them. I also promised her that I would get her married soon. At 6 o'clock in the evening everyone including the girl went away. Many days ago this girl's marriage negotiation took place with Dr. Chintamani Sahoo. Chintamani Sahoo was not married then. I wrote him a letter describing all these incidents and requested him to marry this girl. He agreed to the proposal. Then Bayani came from Nabapatna to the Women's Welfare Ashram and her marriage took place there. Many ladies and gentlemen of Cuttack attended this marriage. Some days after the marriage, another groomless bride named Sashi, daughter of Shri Raghunath Sahu of Mahammadia Bazar, sent me word that she wanted to get married. After some days she was given in marriage to Mr Kartik Ch Sahoo of Phulanakhara in the premises of the Women's Welfare Ashram. These three marriages took place in the

Women's Welfare Ashram. Afterwards, many more such marriages in the Baisya caste took place in the mafoussil areas.

After almost 40-42 marriages of groomless brides and widows took place in the Women's Welfare Ashram, hundreds of such marriages were performed in Orissa. Now such marriages are accepted by the society. From a funny poem given below, one can find out how the conservative Brahmins had reacted when the marriage of groomless brides and widows got social approval. It is written by pundit Shri Parikshit Das, Editor of Sanatana religion in a booklet titled *Dambhika Mada*.

Dambhika Mada

Bairagi mishra said one day in the meeting that widows

Should appeal to him for husbands.

No other male in the city was engaged in such business.

No Brahmin married his daughter for this fault.

So he turned against all Brahmins and is showing his enmity now.

Now that time has changed, who accepts his own faults?

The dim-witted old Brahmin widow of Gopinathpur said to Mishre,

'Our own sins have turned us widows; what sins had our husbands committed?

Shall we not make them suffer in hell getting married again?'

'Stop it oh bitch, don't say such a thing,

Go, go from here, and don't show your shameless face.'

Mishre didn't learn anything; his past views remained as strong.

The widows appealed in the meeting relating the matter

When the widows were not given in marriage in the moffousils

The widowers and young men were put to trouble by being excommunicated.

Mishra's quarter now became a holy place for the widows

Bairagi Mishra's quarter is now a place of amusement for them

He needs to go from village to village to convince and lift up widows

Taking leave from office, he searches for widows in moffoussils

Earlier old women and young girls had a limit

Now the beating of brooms of these shrews have taught the widowers a lesson.

Now the eligible son of the race has brought out a law of marriage for groomless brides

'Groomless' means a ditch, idiots call it 'Bimbara'

If those widows get married again the grooms will go to the ditch.

Blessed is the idiot pundit, learning is afraid of whom?

Bairagi Mishra is not a Hindu; ask him if it is not true.

Mother died he didn't get shaved, does a Hindu ever do this?

What a God has he become now by kicking the *Vedas* and laws?

My Promotion Stopped

Once a very strict collector named Varnid sahib came to Cuttack. When he saw that the chairs and tables in the office were not clean, he ordered the clerks to do the cleaning with their own hands. The Cutcherry would not spend anything for the cleaning and the clerks were not allowed to spend anything from their pockets to employ labourers to get the work done. He wrote, 'Clerks must do that with their own elbow grease.' After getting the orders the Ray sahib, Mr Giridhar Ray, too, who received a salary of 250 rupees a month, also had to bring the furniture out and clean them himself by fetching water from the river. This peculiar scene of bondage of the clerks is still fresh in my mind. When I witness such a thing, the feeling comes to my mind that one has to take recourse to servitude and inferiority

only for the sake of showing off one's luxury and conceit to one's neighbours friends and relatives.

Varnid sahib came to inspect the Nazarkhana when I was working there. I kept book no 43 with me. Whatever summons came from various departments were recorded in that book and were given to the peon to enforce them When the peon returned the book after enforcing the summons all the staff of the office ticked me off for what I had written. After reading my explanation the head clerk said, 'I know that you are not afraid of being dismissed. But will I be able to retain my job after sending this explanation to the sahib? Now write as I say.' Accordingly I wrote an explanation and pleaded for forgiveness. To that the sahib replied, 'Your promotion stops until my next orders'. Then I was ordered to be transferred to Kandhamal. But for some unknown reasons my transfer to Kandhamal stopped. My promotion too stopped for the next 5-6 years without any fault of mine. Before getting the pension my salary was 70 rupees. After a lot of trouble I got a pension of 30 rupees per month. You can find out details about my getting the pension from the following discussion:

Taking Pension

According to the law, the Government workers were to be paid half the amount of their salary as pension if they served for 30 years in the office. But in the Government of Orissa there was a special rule that one could take leave with half of the salary before 2 years and four months of the completion of 30 years if one wished and could also get their pension. I had been waiting to take that leave for many days. I appealed for the leave in 1942 when the right time for it arrived. I wrote in the application, 'I am incapable of serving in this post any more. According to the laws I should be given leave with half of my salary.' Deputy Bhagaban Mohapatra put his remarks on my application as, 'Although such laws are prescribed, such a leave is never granted to anyone. If such leaves are granted then discipline could not be maintained in the Cuttecherry. This clerk seems to be very weak. It would be better for him if he takes his

pension by producing a medical certificate for his invalidity.' At that time a conservative Brahmin named Nityananda Mishra was working temporarily in place of the head clerk, Radhanath Mitra. If Bhagaban Babu had written the same thing to the doctor, which he had written in my application, the doctor would perhaps have understood Bhagaban Babu's intentions and would have given me a certificate for invalidity. But instead of writing that, the gentleman wrote to the doctor, 'This clerk has given an application that he does not want to serve in the office any more. Please report us whether he is physically fit to work.' The doctor deduced from this that the collector did not want me to receive pension by producing a certificate for my physical unfitness. So he said to me, 'Resign if you don't want to work anymore. I can't give you a false certificate for this reason.' But when I insisted on it, he reported that I be given a leave of one month for suffering from pyorrhoea. Perhaps the reason why Nityananda Babu wrote this to the doctor instead of the actual fact is that his 15-16 years old granddaughter had lost his bridegroom when she was but 11 or 12 years old. This girl was the daughter of his neighbour, Jadunath Mishra. Jadunath Mishra worked as a clerk in the Collector's Cutcherry. Nityananda Babu always created problems for the marriage of this girl. Nityananda Babu had married for the second time and a son was born to him when he was 52-53 years of age. Once I told him in support of some clerks, 'A son is born to you at this age, at the time of taking pension, while a 15-16 years old granddaughter of yours is observing celibacy. Which religious scripture preaches such a thing?' When this girl reached 25-26 years of age, I gave her in marriage to Mr Bhimacharan Chaudhury of Utkal tannery. I have already related this topic in the book. Nityananda babu was perhaps angry with me for what I had said to him. And this anger led him to write such a thing to the doctor.

Some days later, the head clerk, Radhanath Mishra came back after his leave. He told me that he would grant me this leave of one month but then he postponed it for another two months. When I reported to the collector that I was not being granted a leave, the

head clerk explained to him that Pyorrhoea is not such a disease which renders someone inefficient to work in the office. Hence, the collector gave his orders—'Let the civil surgeon report if the clerk is absolutely unfit to work.' In the beginning the doctor showed reluctance to give such a report. But I explained to him the matter and when came to know that the head clerk was creating troubles for me, he gave this report—'Although I had recommended a leave of one month, the clerk has not undergone any treatment yet. If further delay occurs in his treatment he will become absolutely unfit in future.' The doctor mentioned the term 'Absolutely Unfit', which the collector had written. This made the head clerk feel mortified but he was forced to grant me leave in the end. When he met me, he got angry with me and said, 'Mind bairagi Babu, I won't grant you one day's extension.' I immediately retorted saying, 'Mind Radhanat Babu, I won't return to this office. Pension money of 35 rupees per month wouldn't stand in my way.'

The head clerk gave me a slip on which was written that I had been granted a leave. He had also asked me to transfer the charge to someone else. One has to write about transferring the charge under the collector's order. So I did not write anything regarding it in the slip. In its place I wrote that the file be sent to me. But the head clerk did not send any files and sent for me instead. I did not go to him. I put into words to the collector through the deputy that the head clerk asked me to transfer charge on a slip of paper without showing me the file. I also mentioned the reason why the head clerk said that he would not grant any more leaves. The Deputy understood everything. He brought the file from the head clerk and handed it to me saying, 'You won, now don't give this application to the collector.' I acted upon what the deputy said and withdrew my application. The Cuttecherry used to begin in the morning at that time. On 8th may 1942 at 12 P.M, I transferred the charge and took leave from the office. That evening I met the head clerk Radhanath Mitra at Kazi Bazar Square. He said to me, 'Why did you get angry with me this morning?' I replied, 'I didn't at all get angry with you. If at all I got

angry, it was with the head clerk of the Cutcherry. You are like a friend and a brother to me.' He stroked my back saying, 'I will grant you leave even if you bring a certificate from any unidentified doctor or *kaviraj*.' Although he said this to me, I could make out that he had not got rid of his previous annoyance for me. After getting the leave I went to my younger daughter's house at Baripada. From there I got a certificate from an assistant surgeon and applied for a leave of 3 months more. To this, the head clerk gave orders that I produced a certificate from the doctor in Cuttack. So I went to my eldest daughter's house at Athagarh in Hazaŕiwag district. From there I wrote that I be allowed to produce a certificate from the doctor at Hazariwag. By this time I had completed/enjoyed 3 months of ungranted leave. A letter reached me which read, 'Show reason/cause why you should not be dismissed for staying on leave without permission?' I had good relations with the doctor of Athagada. I showed this letter from the collector to him. He could understand that it was most probable that I would get sacked from my job and sent a letter to the doctor of Hazribag through me. After reading the letter, the doctor gave me a certificate for a leave of six months. This leave had not got over when I got a certificate for unfitness from the doctor, producing which I received my pension from the Cutcherry. I lived in my elder daughter's house and brought/drew the pension money from the treasury of Ranchi.

The collector would have been forced to grant me leave if I had complained on time regarding the head clerk's report and about the doctor in Cuttack for not giving me a certificate for unfitness. But I was in a tangle with the head clerk due to my obstinate nature and it simply went out of my mind at that time that I had the right to get a leave of 2 years and four months. That obstinacy of nature is still with me for which I have to face many problems. Again, the head clerk, Nityananda Babu would not have written such a thing to the doctor if I had told him modestly in the absence of other clerks instead of saying in their presence that he produced children at an old age while his young grand daughter observed widowhood.

· I drew my pension money from the Ranchi treasury and went to my elder daughter's house at Aragada in district Hazaribag. I stayed there for almost a year. A coal mine is situated there. I used to go on evening walks with the workers of the mine. We often discussed about religion and social reformation during such evening promenades. One day the compounder/pharmacist of the hospital of that place and the head clerk of the coal mine office had an argument regarding idolatry. The former was against it while the latter preached for idol worship. He argued that this practice has been commended in the *Bhagbad Gita*. When they sought my opinion regarding the matter, I said that I had not read the *Gita*. When I asked the head clerk which portion of the *Gita* preaches for idolatry, he could not reproduce the original *sloka* from that *Gita* to support his argument. He got such an idea of the *sloka* only by reading some of its interpretations. He said to me, 'You can find it out if you read the first five *slokas* of the twelfth chapter.' That evening I read these five *slokas* in the head clerk's house. I found that the language of the *Gita* was very lucid. In the original *sloka* there is no mention of idol worship. I understood from these five *slokas* that the commentators of the *Gita* have interpreted two more words like 'sakar' and 'nirakar' and have praised idol worship there. From the fifth *sloka* I understood that let alone praising idolatry, the *Gita* has clearly forbidden even to indulge in worshipping unmentioned Gods and the *Paramatma*. This new teaching of the *Gita* put an impact on me and I felt a deep urge to read the whole of it. From the 'anususruma' mentioned in the forty-fourth solka of the first chapter I came to know that it was the basis of the *Gita*. The *Gita* has hit at the source of all the blind beliefs and blind followings by letting Arjuna utter these words. When I found that this foundation of the *Gita* had not drawn anyone's attention, I wrote and published a book titled *Anususruma of the Gita*. The commentators of the *Gita* have misinterpreted the 'sankarasya' mentioned in the twenty-second sloka of the third chapter as 'barna sankarasya'. I saw that there was no reason to destroy the

universality of the term 'sankara'. So, I published yet another book titled *From Sankara to Barna Sankara*. After reading the thirty-ninth *sloka* of the second chapter I understood that the original teaching of the *Gita* and a completely new teaching had began from here. The *sloka* reads:

'Esa tehbhihita samkheye buddhirjoge twomam sruru

Buddhya'jukto jaja partha! Karmabandhan Prahasyase'

A simplification:

Esa buddhihi te samkhye abhihita; joge tu imam (budhim) srunu; jaga buddhya juktah san he partha! (twam) karma bandham prahasyasi.

Meaning: This is taught to you through number. Now listen to this intelligence through Yoga; O Partha! If you get connected with this intelligence, you can free yourself from the ties of deed.

The writers of the *Gita* have used the term 'intelligence' here for the first time. They have divided this concept into 'Samkhsya Buddhi' and 'Joga Buddhi'. They have criticized 'Samkshya Buddhi' or the intelligence of the book and have praised the other one. But the commentators of the *Gita* have interpolated some thing very imaginary into it and have brought out opposite meaning of the text. In other words, they have praised 'Samkhsya Buddhi' and have put 'Joga Buddhi' at a lower position. The 'Byabasayatmika Buddhi' mentioned in the 41 *sloka* in this chapter have been misinterpreted as 'Nischayatmika Buddhi'. Many commentators, like Sridhara Swami, have also explained that one can surely get salvation by praying to God and that this intelligence is known as 'Nischayan Buddhi'. I found that the writers of the *Gita* have used 'Byabasayika Buddhi' in *sloka* no. forty-one of chapter two to explain 'Yoga Buddhi', which they mentioned in *sloka* no. thirty-nine. The actual meaning of this term is 'Karmatmika Buddhi'. From the topic 'Abipaschita' mentioned in *sloka* no forty-two I understood that the writers of the *Gita* have used the term unconsciously/mudha to describe those who blindly follow all the laws of the *shastras*. The

actual meaning of the phrase 'Budhau Sharanamnwichha' mentioned in *sloka* no. forty-nine of this chapter is 'be willing to take recourse to intelligence'. I also discovered that Shankaracharya have added the adjective 'Samkhye' to support the intelligence of books which the writers of the *Gita* criticized. Anyways, there is no valid reason why the adjective 'samkhye' should be added to the word 'Buddhi' while interpreting its meaning and why the word 'Buddhi' should become 'Samkhsya Buddhi' or 'almighty' instead of remaining 'Samkhsya Buddi' itself. From the two *slokas* given below I understood and you can also understand easily that the advice of the *Gita* is just the opposite of what is interpreted by its commentators. The commentators of the *Gita* have given such opposite interpretation of the *Gita* to support their own belief as what the *Gita* preaches is just the contrary of our belief what we think.

The two *slokas* are given below:

'Traigunyabisaya Veda Nistraigunyo Bhabarajuna!

Nirdwandwo Nitya Satwastho Niryogakhsema Atmaban.'

(2^{nd} -45)

'Sreyan Swadharmo Bigunaha Paradharmaht Schwanusthitat.

Swabhabaniyatam Karma Kurbannopnoti Killwisham.'

(18^{th} – 47)

A simplification of the first *sloka*:

Vedaha Traigunyaha Bisayah,

'Hey Arjuna! (twam) Nistraigunyah Bhaba, Nirdwanda,

Nitwa Satwasthay, Niryoga Khsamah, Atmabah Bhaba.'

Meaning: All the *Vedas* speak about *satwa*, *raja* and *tama*. O Arjun! Break free from the strangleholds of these three qualities and be invincible. Break the shackles of Yoga and Khsyama and always be conscientious and satwastha/be yourself.

From the *slokas* numbered forty-two, forty-three and forty-four, you can make out that the writer or the *Gita*, in order to advise us to make ourselves free from the *Vedas* (vedatita), have landed up in

asking us to be free from negative qualities and be conscientious and satwastha human beings. Now you can make out easily that all these things but mean the same.

The five things that are said in this *sloka* earlier need not be explained here. Again, discussing them would constitute yet another book. So, let us proceed with the discussion of the saying 'be yourself'. Shankaracharya has interpreted it as 'Satwaguna – Marshito Bhabah' – meaning 'take recourse to satwa guna', which is completely out of the context/another issue. Because, it would be completely baseless for the writers of the *Gita* to ask us to be free from negative qualities in the first line of the *sloka* and to take recourse to satwaguna in the very next line. Again, the writers of the *Gita* have said in the fourteenth (chaturdasha) chapter that satwa/self, raja and tama/darkness are the three reasons to keep us confined. The fact that the self/satwaguna is the reason for bondage is said in the following *sloka*:

'Tatra Tatwam Nirmalatwat Prakash Kamanamayam

Sukha Sandgena Bedhnati Jana Sangena Chanagha!'

Meaning – O aghana! Satwa guna/the self keeps human beings confined to happiness and knowledge because it is pure, bright and healthy (anamaya).

Under such a situation, the writers of the *Gita* could never ask us to take refuge to the self/satwaguna. But almost all the commentators have asked us to blindly obey this unreasonable meaning. They have interpreted it as 'satya basture rua'. But this is a wrong interpretation because the word in the original *sloka* is not 'satyastha' but 'satwastha'. Again, Sri Krishna had not taken birth in this world to give the advice that only eminent/important people should remain in the 'satya bastu'. If he had once come as a world teacher, he had come to advise everyone starting from Rama Bauri to Lord Ramachandra to perform their duties as being themselves. Now you can understand that 'be yourself', this philosophy is the most important and a completely new philosophy. Because here, the

writers of the *Gita* have established one's individuality, completeness and liberty along with real equality.

You can recognize the new, real and special meaning of the philosophy 'be yourself' without any doubt after the discussion of the second *sloka*.

Simplification/anwaya of the second *sloka*: Su Anusthitat Paradharmat Bigunah Swadharmah Sreyam; Swabhabaniyatam Karma Kurban (narah) Kilwisam Na Aproti.

Meaning – Someone's negative qualities (biguan) and swadharma are better than well instituted religion of others. Human beings do not commit any sin when they do anything instinctively.

The line that comes before this *sloka* reads:

'Swa Karmana Tambhyarchya Siddhim Bindati Manabah'

Simplification: Swa Karma Tam Abhyarchya Manabah Siddhing Bindati.

Meaning: Every individual achieves siddhi by praying to that unknown self (abyakta satta) (not the Srikrishna of the *Gita*) through his actions.

The *sloka* preceding this it reads:

'Swe Swe Karmanyabhiralah Samsidhim Lbhate narah'

Meaning: Every individual achieves siddhi through indulging in his/her own occupation (18-45). You must realize from this that the word 'swadharma' means one's instinctive occupation. The following line of the aforementioned *sloka* is: 'Sahajam Karma Kauntaya! Sadosamapi Na Tyajet'

Meaning – O son of Kunti/Kunteya! It is not correct to abandon the occupation you are born with even if it is full of faults. You can understand from the line written serially that 'inherent occupation', 'occupation that one is born with', 'one's own deeds' and 'religion', all refer to the same thing. Even though one's own deed or religion is full of faults, it is not proper to abandon it and to search blindly for a well instituted/established religion and deeds of others.

Now you can know that one's own deeds or the work which is inherent in one is not influenced by any racist, communist or socialist beliefs. There is no doubt that it is the personal work of every individual. According to the writers of the *Gita*, if you, through your job, your brother, through his business and your wife, through her cooking could honour that unmentioned presence, every individual could achieve siddhi. But we all live in communities or groups for years and blindly pick up the work that our community performs. Hence, everyone form Shankaracharya to Mahatma Gandhi have interpreted Swakarma/one's own occupation as 'occupation according to one's caste'. When I came across these unreasonable and contrary interpretations I published the *Gita* and some related books relating to it in simple language, which is applicable for all.

The language of the *Gita* is so simple and every *sloka* has such profound link with the *sloka* preceding it that the person knowing Oriya or Bengali or Hindi or any other language, can understand and learn its teachings and get immensely benefited by applying them in their personal lives. But it is a fact to feel sorry that our minds are like 'srati biparna' mentioned in the second chapter of *sloka* no fifty-three. In other words, our minds are full of blind beliefs regarding the *shastras*, deshachar, kulachar, lokachara and such old beliefs that we fail to accept the new advice of the *Gita*. In order to accept the the teaching of the *Gita* based on truth we will have to rid our minds of all the old knowledge and fixed beliefs. We should also get rid of conceits like 'I am Hindu', 'I am Muslim', 'I am Indian', 'I am American', 'I am shakta', 'I am a Vaishnab', 'I am a communist or a socialist' and place the idea in our minds that I am a human being – because the *Gita* is about nothing but human religion.

The World Welfare Committe

I established the World Welfare Committee when I realized that the *Gita* had axed the root of blind beliefs and blind followings – which have affected/devoured the entire human society for ages and causing harm to every individual and thereby, to the entire society –

and has established truth and simplicity in the society. From the year 1954, I published a quarterly magazine titled *Biswakalyana* (World Welfare) at the request of some friends. I had felt long ago that the common people suffered a lot due to wasting a lot of money on jewellery, social occasions/nyaya nimitta and veinglory. Hence, along with ensconcing the *Gita*-religion, I also made the fight against blindbeliefs and blind followings to be the main goal of this magazine. The annual fee of this magazine in advance is/was 1 rupee only (barshika chanda agrima eka tanda matra).

Accepting an Ideal Sacred Thread by Abandoning the Old One

I published a book titled *Andhanusharana O Upanayana* (Blind followings and performing thread ceremonies), when I realized that all the seven rites performed during the initiation of Brahamin boys namely Pumsaban, Simantonayan, Jatikarma etc. and the blind following of rites like Vedarmbha and Samabartana are completely baseless and there is no mention of them in the *shastras*. Then I explained this to some people and did not perform the other nine rites while initiating eight Brahmin boys. Thereby I performed the initiation with a very little expenditure. But I realized that it is dangerous to follow blind beliefs by spending money on performing rites like 'Guru Gruha' in the thread ceremonies when they are no more existent in the society. For this purpose I wrote a book titled *Adarsha Upabita Grahana* (An Ideal Acceptance of the Sacred Thread). Conservative and uneducated Brahmins could never give up wearing the sacred thread. That is why I organized collective thread ceremonies and took 1 rupee from each boy for performing the rites. In such ceremonies, 20 boys in 1954, 25 in 1955 and 9 in 1956, 4 boys and in the last 2 months 4 more Brahmin boys got initiated. Earlier, conservative Brahmins used to blame me saying that the laws of the *shastras* of the past were getting lost. They also used to mock me saying, 'Look! Thread ceremony of 1 rupee is being performed.' But now they have understood the fault of the society in keeping faith in blindbeliefs and have understood my purpose behind doing all these things. So now they keep quiet.

Declaration

Those who have not got rid of blind beliefs yet, can perform the thread ceremonies of their children but must not spend more than 1 rupee on it. But those, who have realized that it is but a blind belief to put on the sacred thread and that it causes harm to the society and feel the need to constitute a world free of social classes, should give up wearing their sacred threads and abstain from initiating their children.

People mentioned below have thrown their sacred threads away. They have also taken an oath not to perform the thread ceremony of their children. They have sent their declaration to the world welfare committee in this regard. My further intention is to get such declarations written by others and eradicate social distinctions.

1. Dr. Bibhuti Bhusana Tripathy (Athagada)
2. Shri Nishamani Tripathy (Patia)
3. Shri Rajkishore Mohapatra (Bantala)
4. Shri Muralidhar Hota (Barhampur)

An Ideal Marriage

An ideal marriage in the Brahmin caste was performed in 1951 at the house of the bride's father which was/lay near the Cuttack station. The bridegroom's father was a devout Brahmin of Pratap Pur Sahsan, P. S. Dharmashala. The bride's father, Shri Damodar Kar hailed from Shasan Purushottam Pur of P.S. Badachanna. He worked as the store clerk in the railway section of the Engineering office. After a lot of persuasion, both the bride's father and the bridegroom's father agreed to perform the marriage according to my instructions. This marriage was performed according to all the Vedic rules with the expenditure of only 7 or 8 annas. I said to Brahmin priest, 'It will do if you put only a few grains of rice/one sixth of a seer of rice on jackfruit leaves instead of putting 10-12 seers of it on banana leaves and use a few drops of ghee in the *homa* instead of

using two seers. All the chants may be recited; there is no objection to that.' The priest and others present at the marriage understood everything and the same thing was carried out in the marriage. Overall, we kept away from all sorts of extravagance, blind beliefs and pomp in this marriage. The bride's father and the bridegroom's father themselves brought new clothes for the bride and the bridegroom respectively. Because, it is very natural for rifts to occur among friends if they did not like the clothes given by others, and such a thing is also noticed everywhere. No gifts were received from the relatives. Only two annas from two to three persons from the bride's party were accepted as gift. Though a friend of the bride's father used to get a salary of 400 rupees per month, he had sent only two annas as gift/bebhara and had kept his friendship keeping my request printed on the invitation card. I pointed at a professor present at the marriage and said, 'In order to buy a bridegroom, who is a professor, the bride's father has to spend at least 3,000 to 5,000 rupees. We should feel sorry that people look for such a thing for themselves and still attend the feast at the bride's house and relish the pilau rice, fish curry, rice pudding, and rasgoolas served there.' After hearing this from me, a gentleman said, 'Are you asking us not to eat here?' I replied, 'Nothing except rice, dal and curry will be served here. Not a penny more than twenty-five annas is spent per head. I am making you aware earlier so that you would not blame the bride's father later. Not a single ornament has also been given to the bride.' It was explained to everyone present in the marriage ceremony how they could make their family lives happier by performing such marriages. The identities and photographs of this couple are given here/below.

Bridegroom – Shriman Umanath, son of Shri Lokanath Das of Pratap Pur Sasan, P.S. Dharmashala.

Bride – Mrs Bindu Basini, second daughter of Shri Damodar Kar of Purushottampur Shasan, P. S. – Badachanna.

Another ideal marriage in the Brahmin caste was performed in 1953. It took place in Baripada. Like the earlier marriage, the

expenditure did not exceed seven to eight annas in this marriage too. No gifts of friendship were exchanged among/between the parties. Rice pudding, pilau rice, meat etc. were not served in the feast, which was frugal and included only rice, dal and plain curry. When two conservative Brahmins objected saying that the Vedas and traditions are getting extinct, I said, 'Neither the bridegroom, nor his elder brother, Doctor Bibhuti Babu wear a sacred threads. In such a case, why should a priest utter the chants like, 'Jatha Rabanyasa Mandoddari?' Again, the bridegroom is an assistant engineer. In order to get such a bridegroom, the bride's father would have to spend at least 10,000 rupees these days. Can a bride's father let go such a bridegroom because he doesn't wear a sacred thread?'

Introduction of the couple of the Ideal Marriage:

Bridegroom – Assistant Engineer, Shri Bijayananda Tripathy, younger brother of Dr. Bibhuti Bhusan Tripathy (M.D.)

Bride – Mrs Kamala, eldest daughter of Shri Harishchandra Mohapatra.

I am still trying to perform some more such ideal marriages. I am getting declarations written by unmarried young men for the purpose. The undertakings of two such people are given below.

Undertakings for ideal marriage:

I will marry ideally by putting aside all sorts of blind beliefs, blind followings and showcase of luxury according to the instructions of the World Welfare Committee and thereby constitute an ideal life and an ideal family. I am twenty-six years old. After passing the matriculation examination now I am working as an overseer in the experimental firm in Balangir.

Sri Laxmidhar Das

Danda Muhana, Khurda

Dist- Puri

I will make my family life happy and simple by getting rid of all sorts of blind beliefs, blind followings, and unnecessary show off of luxury. I will constitute an ideal life and ideal family by

marrying according to the instructions of the world welfare committee. I will always be careful to keep watch over the blind beliefs, which are at the root of all mishaps. I am twenty-three years old. I will appear in the I.A. examination this year.

Antaryami Satpathy, Dhalapur, Dhenkanal

******

Bairagi Charan Mishra's autobiography is a record of a relentless struggle against hide-bound social customs and the cruelty meted out to women in the early decades of the twentieth century in Orissa. His life was animated by a passion for reform and a pursuit of the truth. The story of his life movingly depicts a heroic struggle of the modern in a traditional society.

Bairagi Charan Mishra (1885-1966) was an eminent social reformer and interpreter of ancient religious scriptures.

Priyambada Pal teaches English at Silicon Institute of Technology, Bhubaneswar.Her areas of interest include translation and painting.

Rs 95.00

ISBN 978-81-906729-0-0